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Miscellaneous pamph.

18.92
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FOUNDATIONS OF HOPE

FOR THE

SALVATION

OF

ALL DYING IN INFANCY:

An Essay.

BY THE

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LONDON :

Printed by R. Clay, Devonshire Street, Bishopsgate;

SOLD BY BAYNES AND SON, 23, PATERNOSTER-ROW ;

AND WESTLEY, STATIONERS' COURT : ALSO BY

EDWARD WRIGHT, MARKET STREET,

CAMBRIDGE.

1821.

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THERE appears but little occasion for prefatory remark to the following pages. The design of them is sufficiently clear from the Title, and the method of advancing towards the accomplishment of that design is particularly explained in proceeding.

The investigation here submitted, was suggested by providential dispensations which excited peculiar interest in the subject; and it is published with a hope that, under the divine blessing, it may subserve the cause of evangelical truth in general, while it administers relief to those who are mourning over their dead. This hope of the writer has been much encouraged by the Association of Ministers educated at the Hoxton Academy, before whom the substance of the Essay was read, by appointment, at their last Anniversary Meeting.

The sentiments conveyed in these pages are reviewed by the Author with the satisfaction of one, who has aimed at the discovery of truth, and has endeavoured honestly to submit his own impressions to others; who has watched against the seductions of the heart, and has daily implored, with entire dependence, divine assistance for the attainment of his object.

In a path so little trodden, and embracing so wide a circuit, he can scarcely hope that he has no where stumbled; but he does hope that no important mistake has occurred, affecting either the doctrines of Revelation, or the merits of his position.

ADVERTISEMENT.

At the suggestion of some esteemed brethren in the ministry, who were present on the occasion above-mentioned, an Appendix was for some time contemplated, which might contain farther discussion on subjects touched upon in the Essay. On mature consideration, however, it has appeared undesirable to enlarge a pamphlet, which has already extended far beyond the original design ; and more conducive to general usefulness, to keep as much as possible within the ordinary range of English readers.

It would have been matter of gratification to the Author, could he have thrown the reasonings into an arrangement more compressed and simple than that which was originally pursued with a view to his personal satisfaction. He will rejoice to find some other writer succeeding where he has failed, and will consider it an honour if his endeavours should in any way subserve the production of a work on the subject, more adapted for general acceptance and usefulness.

In the meantime, he will have abundant occasion for devout and adoring gratitude, if his labours should be the happy means of ministering consolation and improvement to those with whose parental sorrows he can deeply sympathise ; and especially, if the attractions of divine truth should be more powerfully felt by any, from their discovering in these pages, its benignant aspect towards departed infants.

W. H.

Hoxton Academy, December, 1821.

THE SALVATION
OF
DECEASED INFANTS.

INTRODUCTION.

The investigation prompted by benevolence—and is not forbidden curiosity;—still further by personal affection, consistently with the first duties of bereaved friends.—General design of the present Essay; the period of infancy described;—general sentiment announced;—difficulties acknowledged;—general method of discussion stated.

WERE the death of an infant a rare occurrence, it would awaken many a mournful reflection, and suggest many an anxious enquiry into its condition in the unseen world. And whatever may be the fact, the frequency of such occurrences ought not to diminish the interest which they are calculated severally to excite in our hearts. A pestilence, which half depopulates a state, and which is continuing its ravages through successive years, and even generations, must raise the solicitude of survivors to a degree augmented beyond what would

result from a mere consideration of the numbers who have become its victims. We weep over the thousands who have fallen in battle, but shudder as we survey the horrors of that contagion, which may immediately renew its attacks upon ourselves.

From approved computations, it appears, that about one half of the human race die within seven years from their birth. Thus, according to the present population of the world, five hundred millions of every generation, a number sufficient to people another earth as ample as our own, are swept away by death, before they have attained, at least so far as our observation can extend, any important end of human existence. And this process has been going on in similar proportion, through every generation of mankind. Without defining the age at which moral agency commences under our highly favouring circumstances, it may perhaps be assumed, on considering the state of the world in general, and throughout all past generations, that an enquiry into the future condition of children dying in infancy, immediately respects the everlasting state of half the posterity of Adam.

Thus reflecting, even general benevolence cannot repress a desire to ascertain, if possible, whether, in cases so innumerable, the spark of immortality was kindled only that it might be quenched ; whether so many interesting fellow-creatures were brought into relation with sinners, merely to share

with them in everlasting sufferings; or whether divine proceedings in this respect, do not better accord with our apprehensions concerning the divine character, and whether revelation discloses not some traces of a design more congenial with our best feelings.

The general disposition chiefly to be cultivated, is, indeed, a devout acquiescence in providential arrangements. The conviction, that all the dispensations of God are unquestionably right, should operate within us as an habitual principle. Hence, we are bound to repress inordinate curiosity respecting matters unrevealed, and to await, in patient expectation, the developments of another state of being. It appears, however, an unwarrantable assumption, that enquiry into the condition of deceased infants, is chargeable with inordinate curiosity; or that solicitude to discover what grounds divine revelation affords us to hope for their happiness, proceeds from the want of due submission to the will of God. Christianity is the religion of man, intended to promote the perfection of his nature; it cannot, therefore, be hostile to principles implanted in him by the Author of his nature; much less can it countermand the genuine expression of feelings which it requires us to cultivate, which its influence refines, and to which its discoveries impart an acuteness, and an energy, otherwise unexperienced and inconceivable.

To parents who have been called to resign their beloved infants to the grave, the investigation proposed, acquires an interest and an importance, far beyond all which arises from sentiments of general benevolence: it appears awfully momentous. The bereaved bosom, chilled with its loss, cannot catch a glow sufficiently cheering and satisfactory, from some general and indefinite persuasion, that those who were so dear on earth, are happy in heaven. In such cases, when less interested, we can more easily come to a decision; for a heart deeply affected is suspicious in proportion as it loves. Hence, there arise causes of doubt, which had not previously occurred; and if ten degrees of satisfaction can be obtained, nine will leave an aching void.

To learn those practical lessons which our bereavements are calculated to teach, should unquestionably be our first concern. But no pious person can become indifferent to the everlasting condition of that being, whom he was the instrument of bringing into existence; whose welfare entwined itself with every cord of his heart; in behalf of whom, his dearest hope and most earnest desire were, that he would become a child of God, an immortal companion in the employments and felicities of heaven. And where, or on what principle, does our heavenly Father prohibit such solicitude? Where is the sorrowing parent required to renounce

a relief, so soothing to his agonizing heart, as exploring the expanse of revelation, to discern, if possible, the track through which a beloved spirit had recently ascended to the Redeemer's bosom?

That the attention of wise and holy men should have been attracted by this subject, is less wonderful, than that few, if any, have entered fairly and fully into the investigations which it requires. From certain general principles, most writers appear to have reached their conclusion; and that conclusion has varied according to the principle which regulated their proceedings. The present Essay is not intended to oppose, nor even to expound, the hypotheses of others; but to submit a course of investigation, pursued under the guidance of some intimations discovered in the Sacred Volume, aided by the light incidentally cast on the subject, from the blending radiance of its most important doctrines.

Infancy is here understood to comprehend, that period of early life during which the energies of human nature are not sufficiently developed for employing objective means of moral knowledge, and there is, consequently, no natural capacity for happiness from moral considerations. This period is not defined, and perhaps admits of no limitation generally applicable; since from various causes, it may vary indefinitely in different subjects. In the following discussion, it is assumed, that the

deceased children, of whatever age, were not moral agents. And concerning these, it is concluded, that while the Holy Scriptures supply more copious and satisfactory grounds of hope for the happiness of deceased infants, who descended from pious parents, they yet reveal enough to warrant a persuasion that all children dying in infancy, of whatever age and clime, are “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

It is not, however, to be concealed, that the way to this conclusion is occupied by difficulties, at first sight appalling, and apparently insurmountable. These demand our first attention, both because they chiefly arise out of certain doctrines of revelation, which are justly deemed to be of established verity, and of prime importance; and also because, unless these be removed, every step of the progress will be embarrassed, and many a cheering prospect will be intercepted. Should it be found that, allowing to the doctrines themselves their entire magnitude and appropriate range, the difficulties which seemed to attend them no longer thwart our course, we may then advance without impediment, and, ascending the elevations of revealed truth, may breathe their reviving atmosphere, and catch among their delightful prospects, a distant view of the mansions where our absent infants dwell.

PART THE FIRST.

THE HAPPINESS OF DECEASED INFANTS IS CONSISTENT
WITH VARIOUS LEADING DOCTRINES OF REVELATION,
AND WITH ACKNOWLEDGED FACTS.

IN this part of the discussion, there is chiefly intended an appeal to the analogy of faith, or that principle of harmony which must subsist among doctrines divinely revealed, so that matters doubtful or obscure, may, in some respects, be determined by a reference to other matters clearly exhibited. Our minds will hesitate concerning the salvation of departed infants, in proportion as the opinion appears inconsistent with various points of undoubted truth. Dear as the thought may be, it must not be indulged in defiance of the well-attested announcements of Holy Scripture.

And this view demands our first attention, for the reasons lately suggested. It is, moreover, the first which occurs to a mind anxiously enquiring; nor will the most encouraging intimations of the Sacred Volume tranquillize the heart, or even find an unopposed admission there, while it is agitated with suspicions, growing out of conscientious convictions derived from the tenor of revelation.

It is deemed neither necessary nor desirable, to illustrate at large, much less to attempt any proof of, the doctrines themselves which come under notice. But, in some instances, where different hypotheses have been constructed on the facts as they appear in the Scriptures, or where the difficulties arise from a misapprehension of theological questions, something of this nature seems important.

While the prime object is, from honest conviction, to establish the position immediately before us, it is considered indispensable to the satisfaction of enquirers, to shew how that position may harmonize with various apprehensions of the same scripture doctrine,—a process in some cases found more easy, than to determine which of two opinions is to be preferred. At the same time, it is conceived, that in proportion as the tests are multiplied to which the position can be subjected, so much the more likely we are to ascertain its compatibility with the whole system of revealed truth. A greater measure of satisfaction, is worth a more varied and extended illustration than might be absolutely necessary to the argument.

SECTION I.

The silence of the Scriptures ought to be no discouragement.

How this produces anxiety. But the silence of the Scriptures proves nothing;—this point not within their design;—on other interesting points, equally reserved;—explicit revelation not necessary to the truth.

A DEVOUT person, under the excitement of peculiar interest in this enquiry, in the first place, naturally desires and seeks some explicit declaration on the subject in the Sacred Volume. Finding to be ineffectual, a scrutiny which, in defiance of similar endeavours, he was impelled by solicitude to pursue with hopes of better success than his predecessors, he too commonly resigns himself to despondency. Repelled from unwarranted hopes, he is precipitated, by a revulsion too natural, to an equally unwarranted despair. He persuades himself that, on a matter so highly important to his comfort, his compassionate Father has been silent, because he would not augment the grief of the living, by disclosing the awful condition of the dead. Thus, as in many other cases, by grasping at too much, we lose what might have been obtained.

Were not the mind of such enquirer discomposed by its own eagerness, an observation commonly made, and obviously just, would occur for its relief:—the silence of scripture in such cases,

proves nothing. If, therefore, not a sentence could be found in the Sacred Volume, to guide our enquiries into the condition of deceased infants, the question would still be left at large. Though in such a case, revelation would not gratify our hopes, neither would it vindicate our despair. A single consideration will place this remark in a just and forcible light. Only let it be supposed, that the very reverse were the matter of investigation, or that the sacred pages were explored to ascertain, whether they denounced a dreadful doom on infants deceased. Ought the enquirer to be convinced of their happiness, merely because no such frightful disclosure could be discovered? If such a conclusion be legitimate, all further enquiry is needless; and no reasoning is required to shew that it must be equally valid with the inference under consideration, that is, neither conclusion is just, because both proceedings are on a false principle.

Explicit information on the subject before us, hardly lies within the appropriate range of divine revelation. The Holy Scriptures are given to mankind as the grand instrument of moral providence, and are “profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” While they approve themselves a faithful and sufficient guide, in all the passages, and for all the important purposes of our present

existence, we have no reason for dissatisfaction, though they should be no farther explicit or freely communicative. An intelligent and benevolent guide, sustains his character, by conducting us safely through difficulties and dangers to the end of our journey. And though from such a conductor we might perhaps obtain much to gratify laudable curiosity, and relieve the toils of the way, yet these farther advantages ought to be considered as incidental to his professed character, they must be expected to result rather from our enquiries, than from his official undertaking; and it would be a highly irrational presumption, that he ought to resolve all our doubts, remove all our difficulties, and put us in full possession of every subject on which we desire information. To estimate aright the gifts of our Universal Benefactor, we must keep in view the design of his several bestowments, and regulate our expectations from them according to that design, rather than by the importunity of our own desires.

There are, accordingly, innumerable questions of high interest, on which no satisfaction can be obtained, or ought to be expected, from the Sacred Volume. Even concerning that world whither divine revelation is conducting us, little more information is communicated than may suffice to stimulate or encourage our advances. We should certainly be gratified, and, we may conceive, edified, by some explicit announcements from heaven, in

answer to our enquiries, wherein consists the identity of this mortal body, and of that immortal body with which we expect to be invested;—whether departed saints are permitted to hover round endeared survivors, to observe their circumstances, and minister to their welfare;—in what manner disembodied spirits hold mutual intercourse;—and whether the relations of earth will be recognized among the inhabitants of heaven. On these, and many similar points we may, by soliciting the assistance of our spiritual guide, obtain some incidental information; but to instruct us on these topics, is clearly out of his official province, as they are not directly subservient to the designs of sovereign benevolence. Of the point under consideration, it must be maintained, that a revelation does not lie within the province of holy scripture, because it is not necessary to furnish us unto all good works. What new duty would grow out of a revelation concerning the state of deceased infants? or what inadequate motive to known duty, would that revelation sustain and enforce? In what respects is such a communication necessary to the promotion of holiness, and thus to a meetness for the inheritance above?

To be assured from the mouth of God that our departed infants are among the blessed, would indeed be the sweetest solace to our afflicted hearts; but so, also, under different circumstances, would

the certain knowledge of other matters on which the Sacred Volume is even more reserved. The sources of divine consolation diffuse their healing streams, not with an ultimate or even a principal view to present comfort, but in subserviency to practical religion; that, refreshed and invigorated, we may “run and not be weary, walk and not faint.” To behold in the Gospel, clearly displayed, the glory of our departed infants, might perhaps allure our hearts toward heavenly realities; but we ought to require no other attractive than Jesus sitting at the right hand of God.

Nor is explicit revelation indispensable to the discovery of divine truth. On many points both of doctrine and practice, where this is wanting, we are at a moral certainty of the truth. Even on some momentous doctrines of Christianity, and on some practices which characteristically distinguish us as disciples of Christ, questions may be asked that cannot be answered by direct reference to the authority of revelation. From certain premises supplied by revelation, they are conclusions deduced by an intellectual process, so easy and clear, as scarcely to be observed by an undisciplined mind. Where, for instance, within the compass of Holy Writ, do we find the following, or any equivalent propositions: “In the Godhead there are three personal subsistencies;—none shall be saved who were not chosen in Christ before the foundation of

the world;—females are to be admitted to the Lord's table, and infants to baptism"? We, in fact, learn these things by evident and necessary deduction from the plain announcements of revelation, and are scarcely less certain concerning the truth and will of God respecting them, than we should be from his express declaration.

Now if, on matters so highly important to faith and practice, we must form our own conclusions from declarations and facts explicitly recorded, ought we to consider the want of express scripture testimony respecting the happiness of departed infants, a final prohibition of our hopes? And if, concerning those points, we can nevertheless arrive at such a measure of certainty respecting truth and duty, why may we not, under similar circumstances, attain some comfortable grounds of hope on the subject of our present discussion? It is not meant to insinuate by these suggestions, that in the case under consideration, grounds for a cheering conclusion are equally strong, or the way to that conclusion equally direct and evident, as in the other cases selected for illustration. An appeal is made to the principle of disquietude stated above; and the intention of that appeal is, to shew that the happiness of departed infants may be demonstrable, in the absence of a species of evidence which has been so earnestly desired, and so repeatedly sought for in vain.

SECTION II.

The relation of deceased Infants to Adam, does not forbid our hopes.

Infants involved in the consequences of the fall ;—hence, *depraved* and *guilty*. *Depravity*, a loss of the divine image, but not a disposition positively evil ;—the occasion of actual transgressions, if life continue—but does not in itself subject to divine abhorrence. *Guilt*, or subjection to sufferings ;—future punishment not inferable from present sufferings ;—no evidence that God rejects one personally innocent ;—sense of guilt, &c. necessary in future punishments,—which infants cannot have ;—perhaps punishment not an arbitrary infliction. On the whole, original sin not conclusive against the position.

SINCE death is the wages of sin, and infants are personally innocent, they must in some way be implicated in the sin of another. And we are informed on infallible authority, that by virtue of the relation subsisting between the first man and his posterity, those “who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression,” become involved in the consequences of his apostacy ; and hence are subject to death. In vain has human ingenuity endeavoured to undermine this doctrine of divine revelation, or to substitute any hypothesis which could more satisfactorily account for the sufferings and mortality of beings personally innocent. The fact appears unquestionable, and

presents a very affecting, as well as to many, a very alarming view of the case under contemplation.

Though all who, on questions of divine truth, take the Scriptures for their infallible guide, receive in general this important doctrine, yet they entertain diversities of opinion, neither few nor of small moment, concerning the extent to which the consequences of Adam's first transgression are entailed on his posterity, and even concerning the precise import of "death" as the punishment incurred, according to the divine denunciation. It is not intended here to examine those opinions. And it is in general assumed, that what is commonly, though inadequately, termed original sin, includes both the moral and the natural consequences of our first parents' fall, that is, *depravity* and *guilt*. Yet this natural depravity and guilt, provided our views of them be regulated by certain previous considerations of undoubted verity, by no means impel us to the frightful conclusion, that any perish for ever, merely in consequence of their relation to Adam.

As has been formerly observed, it is no part of the present design to expound or advocate the truth of those doctrines, whence discouragements have arisen to anxious enquirers into the subject before us. But on the doctrine of human depravity, some illustrative remarks appear important, since the most formidable difficulties in our course, arise

from what are conceived to be misapprehensions respecting the nature of that moral degradation in which mankind are born.

It is held that the posterity of fallen Adam inherit a depraved nature,—are spiritually dead, “being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their hearts.*” While the body is depraved, by a destitution of original beauty, vigour, and aptitude for immortality, it is more important to observe, that the soul, that part of man which constitutes him a moral and accountable agent, is depraved by a destitution of the divine image, or that sovereign endowment by which our great progenitor possessed, from the first moment of consciousness till his fall, an intuitive perception of right, and an instinctive bias towards holiness.

Some persons, however, seduced perhaps by false or at best inadequate analogies, have entertained a notion, that natural and hereditary depravity, is a quality positively vicious, a tendency or disposition of the soul towards moral evil. Hence, the subject has been involved in endless perplexity; questions have arisen which admit of no satisfactory solution, and many individuals have been driven to scepticism in the very face of divine testimony. That human depravity will produce

* Eph. iv. 18.

personal transgression, wherever life continues till moral agency commences, appears to be unquestionable; but to conceive of original sin as including a positive propensity to moral evil, seems unwarranted by the Scriptures, unsupported by fact, and even a contradiction in terms; for a propensity to moral evil is obviously a personal transgression, which, according to such an hypothesis, is conceived of as committed by a being personally innocent, and even as yet incapable of moral agency. To all who reflect with awful reverence on the holiness of the divine character and operations, it must appear a revolting supposition, that the Father of spirits immediately produces accountable beings, with moral obliquity, or a positive tendency to sin.

Such, at least, is not the doctrine of human depravity, as maintained by very judicious divines. "God," says one,* "only creates the naked essence of our souls, our natural faculties, a power to think and will, and to love and hate; and this *evil bent* of our hearts is *not of his making*, but is the *spontaneous propensity* of our *own wills*. For we being born devoid of the divine image, ignorant of God, and insensible of his infinite glory, do of *our own accord* turn to ourselves, and the things of time and sense, and to any thing that suits a graceless

* Bellamy, True Religion delineated, p. 166, Edit. 1812.

heart, and there all our affections centre; from whence we natively become averse to God, and to all that which is spiritually good, and inclined to all sin. So that the *positive* corruption of our nature is not any thing created by God, but arises *merely* from a *privative* cause."

"In order," says another,* "to account for a sinful corruption of nature, yea, a total native depravity of the heart of man, there is not the least need of supposing any evil quality, *infused*, *implanted*, or *wrought* into the nature of man, by any *positive* cause or influence whatsoever, either from God or the creature; or of supposing, that man is conceived and born with a *fountain of evil* in his heart, such as is any thing properly positive."

—As *Adam's* nature became corrupt, without God's implanting or infusing of any evil thing into it; so does the nature of his *posterity*. God dealing with Adam as the head of his posterity, (as has been shewn,) and treating them as one, he deals with his posterity as having all sinned in him. And therefore as God withdrew spiritual communion, and his vital gracious influence from the common head, so he withholds the same from all the members, as they come into existence; whereby they come into the world mere *flesh*, and entirely under the government of natural and inferior principles; and so become wholly corrupt as Adam did."

* Edwards, Original Sin, Part IV. chap. 2.

“There is reason to fear,” says another,* “that many have imbibed a notion of original sin, considerably different from what is here asserted. It is not improbable that the *terms* by which the evil has been commonly expressed without a due examination of the idea intended, have had no small influence to effect this. The frequent use of such analogical and allusive terms as *pollution, defilement, corruption, contamination*, and the like, seems to intimate something *positive*; as these expressions in their original meaning convey an idea of something superadded to the subject. Whereas other terms, though equally analogical and allusive, imply no such thing; such as *disorder, discord, confusion*, and the like. We do not mean to condemn the use of the former, or to recommend the latter to their exclusion, but only design to caution against a *wrong inference* from a frequent use of them.”

It appears, then, that human beings are produced with simply the faculties and powers, essential to their nature as intelligent and accountable, without any connatural bias towards either moral good or evil; and that being destitute of the divine image as above explained, they certainly become, on the supposition of the continuance of life till moral agency commences, personal transgressors

* Dr. Edward Williams, Note on Edwards, as above.

of the divine law, and therefore justly amenable to the supreme moral Governor.

To entertain correct and scriptural views concerning the natural depravity of mankind, is on many accounts of considerable importance, and especially so in the bearings of this doctrine on our enquiries into the condition of departed infants. Were they as depraved, the subjects, as some have represented or rather misrepresented the doctrine, of a “*quality like a taint, tincture, or infection, altering the natural constitution, faculties and dispositions of our souls,**” they must, from their very birth, appear odious to a holy God. But as the doctrine is above explained, though there subsist in them nothing to attract the regards of infinite holiness, there is nothing to excite its abhorrence. And by the termination of life during infancy, the soul is removed from the operation of those causes which would otherwise have induced personal transgression, and thus separated between it and God.†

On the ground, therefore, of natural depravity merely, there appears nothing to excite the repugnance of divine holiness to the happiness of deceased infants; and if their relation to Adam preclude them from future bliss, it must be not by the

* Taylor on Original Sin, p. 187, quoted by Edwards, as above.

† Isa. lix. 2.

transmission of a depraved nature, but by subjection to guilt in consequence of his fall.

That infants are held guilty, or subject to natural evil in consequence of the fall, is generally allowed to be a doctrine of revelation, and appears evident from their sufferings and death. But so far as their future happiness is concerned, various considerations may at least diminish the apprehensions which this acknowledged fact too commonly suggests.

The guilt imputable to the posterity of fallen Adam, is maintained by most divines to be, not that which he incurred as *an individual*, by violating his natural obligations to God; but that which he incurred as a *partaker of federal privileges*, by violating the condition on which they had been granted. “What Adam therefore suffered for breach of covenant,” says a judicious divine,* “was a privation of chartered benefits. The unavoidable effect of this, was DEATH; a privation of spiritual life—which continued is death eternal,—and a privation of that protection and care which would have preserved from temporal death.” From what has been observed above, it appears, that the privation of spiritual life constitutes the depravity of human nature, entailed by the fall; whether this must unavoidably be continued, and involve all the

* Dr. Williams, in Edwards, as above, p. 334.

horrors of eternal death in the case of deceased infants, is the precise point of enquiry.

Their corporal sufferings in the present world, do not involve this alarming conclusion. It does not necessarily follow, that he who endures "a privation of that protection and care which would have preserved from temporal death," is, and must be, subject to eternal death. Believers in Christ are no longer considered as subject to the full guilt of Adam's transgression; yet are they equally with others liable to infirmities, sickness, pain, and death; nor can we, by any external dispensations of divine Providence, discriminate between the saved and the lost of mankind. It is indeed true, that such believers give moral indications of "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," which, according to the gospel, ascertain their interest in the life and immortality that it brings to light: by sincere repentance, they are looking to him whom their sins have pierced; and by living faith, they have fled for refuge to the hope set before them. Hence, notwithstanding their subjection to affliction and death, we have an explicit divine warrant, as the ground of our hope for their future happiness, which we confessedly have not in the case of deceased infants. Yet, on the other hand, it ought to be considered, that infants have no personal sins of which to repent, or for which they need a personal recourse to the only

refuge. It is of still greater importance to bear in mind, that we are not here investigating the positive grounds of our hopes respecting them. Reference was made to the affliction and death of believers, to evince, by obvious facts, that implication in the temporal consequences of the fall, does not certainly imply subjection to its full and ultimate consequences; and thus far, the reference appears conclusive in favour of departed infants.

The punishment of sin beyond the grave, appears chiefly to consist in total and hopeless exclusion from the favour of God; the pangs of everlasting remorse from a conviction of having justly incurred that exclusion; and the rage of unbridled appetites and passions, struggling in vain for gratification or relief. These, the bitterest ingredients in the sinner's cup, it seems unwarrantable to suppose can ever fall into that of beings who die without personal transgression.

No portion of the Sacred Volume has occurred, which denounces eternal banishment from the presence of God, on any who have not forfeited that blessing by personal crime. When such declaration is adduced,—clear and unequivocal as the contrary impressions received from the whole tenour of revelation must require, in order to efface them from our hearts,—it will become us to bow and adore. But until then, our hopes remain, so far as this consideration extends, altogether unobstructed.

If an appeal to experience may be allowed, very holy and enlightened persons could attest, that, apart from the remembrance of their personal sins, they are strangers to remorse of conscience. Many, deeply humbled for the degradation of human nature, have adopted the exclamation of David, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me;" and many, deeply convinced of their personal criminality, have shuddered with dreadful forebodings of "the wrath revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." But the case yet remains to be discovered, of one whose soul was wrung with agonies of remorse for Adam's transgression, as his own; or who was gasping with apprehensions of everlasting punishment, as merited by himself, for the apostacy of his first progenitor. Without presuming, however, that, unsupported by the sanction of the sacred records, the experience of any christian is satisfactory evidence of divine truth, it might perhaps reasonably be expected, that were it the divine plan to charge the consciences of men with remorse for their interest in Adam's transgression, the Holy Spirit would, in some instances, convince of this sin, as alone incurring eternal destruction; or at least, that among the many expressions of remorse recorded in scripture, a reference to this would not be altogether undiscoverable. The bearing of this

appeal to experience, on the subject before us, is obvious. Remorse for having deserved eternal banishment from God, is an indispensable ingredient of eternal torment; but remorse for the sin of Adam, imputed, is unknown to spiritual experience, and unexemplified in the recorded experience of ancient saints; yet infants have no other sin with which they can be chargeable, and for which they can thus suffer.

On this point, it is further remarkable, that the divine law never charges the sin of Adam upon his posterity, as their crime, meriting their eternal punishment; and that the gospel calling them to repentance, never enjoins repentance of that sin, as indispensable to deliverance from perdition. Upon any view of imputed guilt, which makes it alone the meritorious cause of eternal death, these facts appear unaccountable.

It is difficult, and perhaps might be pronounced impossible, to conceive, how the worm that never dies, should breed in a conscience, exculpating from personal crime. Equally does it surpass conception, how the rage of unbridled appetites and passions, should become a source of perpetual torment, a just retribution, to a being in whom, during his transient lodgment on a world of probation, those appetites and passions were never formed. Such a being might for ever bewail, as a great affliction, his relation to degraded man; but on what principle

could he charge upon himself, as a merited retribution, the loss of heavenly glory, and the endurance of everlasting burnings?

To those who consider eternal punishment an arbitrary infliction, it may be conceded, that, as to physical ability, the supreme Judge can, by his power over the consciousness of dependant beings, impress them with the idea of a sufficient identity between themselves and their disobedient parent, to render them fully responsible for his crime, as if it were their own; and thus he can produce in them all the pangs of perpetual remorse. But, assuredly, the God of truth will not delude with false impressions. Eternity is not the scene of delusion, either dreadful or delightful; but the empire of pure unveiled and everlasting truth.

But by some, the general accuracy of whose views on divine subjects appears unimpeachable,* it is maintained, that the punishment of sin is not an arbitrary infliction; that to produce all the horrors of eternal misery, the blessed God does but sustain the sinner in existence, leaving him to the consequences of his crimes, destitute of all hope for mercy. Of this opinion it shall only be remarked, that without resting upon it the stress of our present argument, it yet appears highly honour-

* Stapffer, *Pol. Theol.* vol. I. cap. III. § 820, &c.—Dr. Williams—Note to Doddridge's *Lect.* 222.

able to the divine character, strictly consonant to the tenor of revelation, and capable of such an application to the case of deceased infants, as to render the supposition of their future misery altogether incredible.

Without any farther extending this article, to which the importance of the topic demanded peculiar attention, we may venture to conclude, that, whatever be the consequences resulting to deceased infants from their relation to fallen man, they do not appear, in virtue of that relation, to be certainly subjected to hopeless misery. Their descent from Adam, under the condition in which his transgression placed his posterity, does not form an insuperable barrier to our hope for their happiness beyond the grave. Whether a consideration of those sovereign constitutions, by which mankind both fell in Adam and are restored in Christ, may not supply a positive ground for that hope, demands our attention in a place more appropriate.

SECTION III.

The doctrine of Sovereign Election, no just cause of disquietude.

The ground of apprehension stated;—concessions;—yet nothing conclusive against deceased infants. For election—supposes condemnation;—not the cause of destruction to any; Rom. ix. 10—13 does not make against the argument;—God by his prerogative can bless the undeserving, but not injure the innocent;—one of three conclusions must be true; early death sometimes a mark of divine favour;—the disparity between the church militant and triumphant.

ON this ground of disquietude, it is difficult, in the present stage of discussion, to reason at large; because much of the process, as well as the validity of the conclusion, must depend on such exhibitions of the divine character, and developments of the divine purposes, as will demand consideration hereafter. Still, however, various reflections occur, which, without anticipating to any considerable extent what will be more appropriately examined in another place, may perhaps suffice to shew, that the doctrine just announced, does not invincibly conclude against the position here advocated.

The difficulty arising from this great scriptural truth, may be thus represented. We know that personal election of God,—the ultimate cause of salvation to any individual,—is sovereign and free;

and as far as our opportunities of observation extend, on the character and conduct of those who advance far towards maturity, we may have some reasons to fear, that it comprehends comparatively few. There seem also grounds for apprehending, that the same discrimination is exercised, in about the same proportion, towards those who never advanced in life to moral agency. If this be the case, we may too obviously conclude, that the major part of deceased infants are left under final condemnation, while we have no means of distinguishing the happy exceptions, so as to obtain relief for our anxiety respecting individuals.

Deeply lamenting the obduracy of sinful men, and adoring with profound submission the divine supremacy, we are constrained to allow, that comparatively few who reach maturity, give satisfactory evidence that they “were from the beginning chosen to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.” “O the depths, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Whatever sovereign grace may effect in cases beyond the recognition of enlightened persons, or even the power of its subjects to communicate, cannot enter into our calculations. We certainly have no means of ascertaining the spiritual condition of any individual, but the appearance in him of those fruits of righteousness, which, indi-

cating a renovation of nature, manifest divine operation on the heart, and develop the purpose of God to save. For others, as well as for ourselves, we must learn the purpose from the proceedings of God; according to the apostolical injunction, "Make your calling and your election sure." Now of this calling, this saving transformation, infants can afford no practical evidence; and, therefore, their election to salvation must be learned from peculiar considerations, or not at all. It is also conceded, that the reasons of discrimination among individuals of the human race, lie entirely in the mind of God: he can be under no obligation, in equity, to impart the enjoyment of himself to those who die in infancy, any more than to others. Yet allowing their full weight to these concessions, it does not appear that the doctrine before us is decisive against the happiness of any departed infant.

Election to salvation, taken in its full extent, contemplates its objects as previously in a state of merited condemnation: it is remedial of the consequences of sin; it purposes the deliverance of fallen men from the ruin in which they are involved, and their introduction to blessings which they have forfeited. This important truth ought never to be conceived of—according to the misrepresentations of its opponents—as if it regarded men under the relation of mere creatures, and were the exercise of

a capricious determination, assigning some of them to final happiness, and dooming others to unavoidable misery. Let it be repeated, that God, in electing to salvation, illustrates his sovereign benevolence by the twofold purpose just mentioned, of rescuing them from deserved punishment, and of conferring on them forfeited blessings ; or, in other words, the purpose of awarding from them the blow which distributive justice requires, and of bestowing on them privileges which, in equity, were not due to even innocent creatures. To one who thoroughly weighs the illustrations and reasonings of the preceding section, it will perhaps appear, that the aspect of such a doctrine towards personal transgressors, and towards deceased infants, is considerably dissimilar. While, to the happiness of the former, there seem necessary, both the pardon of crimes, the consciousness of which would prove their everlasting torment, and also an admission to the enjoyment of the chief good ; to the happiness of deceased infants, there appears necessary, only the removal of that “judgment to condemnation,” the restoration of those chartered privileges, which were lost by the disobedience of Adam. Thus, there is established a very important dissimilitude between the two cases. And therefore, while convinced that God is not in equity bound to impart the enjoyment of himself to those who die in infancy, any more than to others, we cannot with any justice reason, from

the apparent exercises of discriminating grace towards actual sinners, so as to deduce the terrific inference, that the same discrimination, in about the same proportion, is exercised towards departed infants.

Further, this election to salvation is the rule of divine operations for imparting a disposition to embrace the provisions of redemption. According as God has chosen individuals in Christ before the foundation of the world, he bestows upon them the adoption of children, and redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.* By the influence of the Holy Spirit, therefore, the chosen individual is disposed to receive the testimony of God, and to fulfil the requirements of the Gospel, to the utmost of his means and opportunities. On the other hand, the damning sin of the unregenerate consists in shutting their eyes against the truth, and rejecting, or at least neglecting, the method of deliverance proposed to their acceptance. But to infants those discoveries are not made, those means of escaping destruction are not afforded, nor even a physical ability to employ them if they were. Though, therefore, we have not positive evidence of their election, in a disposition conformed to the requirements of the Gospel, it cannot be concluded that they incur the damning sin of the unregenerate.

* Eph. i. 4—7.

Nor let it escape observation, that while election is wholly of sovereign grace, no one is condemned because not elected, no one is a reprobate antecedent to the consideration of his own iniquities.

But, in connection with this remark, there occurs to recollection a passage which may be thought wholly subversive of the above reasoning. “When Rebecca had conceived by one,” says the apostle, “even by our father Isaac, (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger: as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*” To undertake the illustration of this passage, in its bearings on the doctrine of divine sovereignty in general, is not necessary to our present purpose; for the scope of the apostle in this part of his discourse, together with the references which he makes to Old Testament declarations, evinces that he is reasoning, not on election to salvation, but on the supreme right of God to choose for his own beneficent purposes whomsoever he pleases. Even on the contrary interpretation, this passage does not oppose our argument, as will appear from the following paraphrase of Dr. Guyse. “I, who have a right to place or withhold my unde-

* Rom. ix. 10—13.

served kindness as I please, have determined to leave Esau, among many others of the apostate sinful race of mankind, whom I justly abhor as such—to the free choice of his own will, that he may walk in the way of his own heart.” This exposition at once establishes the difference between the case of Esau, and that which we are considering. God left Esau to the free choice of his own will, that he might walk in the way of his own heart; and thus, it is supposed, his non-election was apparent; but God does not leave those for whom we are now especially concerned to such an awful abuse of human liberty, he takes them away—as we are still permitted to hope—from all danger of incurring so just a reason of divine abhorrence.

Instead of stopping at present to justify the position, it may here be assumed, that though in virtue of his sovereign prerogative, God can and does bestow unmerited favours, it is unworthy of his character to inflict unmerited sufferings. Just so among mankind, an equitable sovereign, may in the exercise of his prerogative, take the orphan of a traitor under his royal patronage, and load him with undeserved proofs of his goodness; but on the other hand, however he may be offended, and though he may leave such child to the inconveniences which naturally result from his peculiar circumstances, he cannot in equity bring the unconscious infant to capital punishment for his father’s crime. Now, if

this principle be correct, we may easily perceive how, in the exercise of sovereign benevolence, the unoffending infants of apostate man can be received to eternal happiness; but are, on the other hand, left utterly at a loss to reconcile their final condemnation with the rectitude of divine government.

On a review of what has above appeared, with respect to the bearing of the doctrine of election on the case of deceased infants, it seems impossible to avoid one of the following conclusions; either that they are introduced to the full felicities of heaven, without the interference of sovereign benevolence in their behalf; or that they remain in some state, intermediate between heaven and hell, where there is exemption from positive sufferings, but the light of God's countenance never shines; or finally, that they are saved by the gracious purpose of God in Christ Jesus. Which of these conclusions is most consonant to revelation, it is needless to specify.

So far from early death being, in any case, a mark of reprobation, we are certain that it has sometimes occurred as a mark of divine favour,—has been affixed as the seal of sovereign benevolence. Of this, an instance occurred where such gracious discrimination might least be expected, in the family of Jeroboam, the man so emphatically announced as “he who made Israel to sin*.” Of all this

* 1 Kings xiv.

wicked man's house, Abijah alone came to the grave in peace; and an early death was the means, divinely appointed, of exempting him from impending calamities. He is not indeed called an infant; and the reason assigned for this peculiar favour, "that in him was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel," may imply indications of early piety; yet he was but a child, and his early death, administered in mercy, may suffice to preclude the heart-rending suggestion, that perhaps the early removal of our little ones is a decisive token of divine displeasure against them. Had this dispensation befallen Abijah at a yet earlier period, it would have been equally in mercy to him. Nor is it certain that he had, at the time of his death, attained to an age capable of expressing holy dispositions; for the "good thing in him" may describe the yet undeveloped operations of discriminating grace within his heart.

Bearing in mind that we are only endeavouring to evince the consistency of our position with the analogy of faith, we may be allowed to suggest the enquiry, what principle of evangelical truth is opposed by regarding death in infancy as an indication of the sovereign and distinguishing love of God? Though death is an evil originally and in itself, may not its occurrence previous to the possibility of personal transgression, be a proof of divine favour, at least as much so as the death of believers in Christ? We

have not, indeed, an explicit revelation that this is the case; but if a revelation to this effect would harmonize with the system of evangelical truth, and nothing be wanting but such divine announcement, it will clearly follow, that the doctrine of election to salvation is not in itself inimical to the opinion here maintained.

Every attentive reader of the Scriptures must be impressed with the discrepancy, in point of numbers, so frequently suggested, as subsisting between the church militant and the church triumphant. As to the visible church on earth, “many are called, but few are chosen;” the church above comprises a “great multitude, which no man can number.” To whatever extent the anticipated millennial period may contribute to this discrepancy, we may still, for all that has hitherto appeared, indulge a hope of discovering among that great multitude, all who were removed in infancy from the evil to come,—as the objects of sovereign election, the precious purchase of redeeming blood.

SECTION IV.

Inability to exercise Faith in Christ does not exclude Infants from Salvation.

The Gospel declares faith necessary,—yet does not thus exclude Infants from salvation.—Is both a *moral economy* and a *display of sovereign benevolence*. Under the *former* view requires faith,—therefore from moral agents only ;—who also have opportunities of knowing it ;—otherwise, God could not by his sovereign pleasure save infants. Under the *latter*, shews faith as a principle wrought in the heart ;—thus more immediately connected with salvation ;—may be produced in infants ;—and in some instances has been.

A SUSPICION may be entertained, that all the above reasoning is rendered nugatory, and our hopes for the happiness of deceased infants demonstrated to be fallacious, by the obvious fact, that the gospel insists on faith in Christ as indispensable to salvation. “ He that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved, and he that *believeth not* shall be damned.” Now, as by hypothesis, infants cannot exercise faith in Christ, to hope for their final happiness may seem to be a fatal presumption, maintained in defiance of direct and unequivocal announcements of revelation. Though this difficulty, together with some others which remain, is not so formidable as those which have received attention, yet is it sufficiently imposing to demand particular consideration.

The gospel comes before us under two distinct but closely connected characters,—as a moral economy, a system provided by divine mercy for the government of fallen men, in order to their restoration to primæval blessedness ; and as a display of sovereign benevolence, developing the purposes and proceedings of God for the salvation of the elect. Under the former view, it shows that the method of redemption accords with the rectitude of the divine character and government ; and under the latter, that the salvation of men is entirely of grace, not of debt. As a moral economy, it consists of exhibitions, instructions, motives, warnings, promises, and threatenings ; as a display of sovereign benevolence, it consists of revelations alone, declaring what the universal Governor purposes and performs. According to the former view, it addresses men as moral and accountable agents ; and according to the latter, contemplates them as fallen creatures, dependent for every good on the Author and Giver of faith. In the former respect, it admonishes us what we must become and do, in order to a personal interest in spiritual blessings ; and, in the latter, points out the source of our strength and efficiency for fulfilling its requirements, “ to the praise of the glory of” divine “ grace.”

A moment’s attention to these remarks, is sufficient to convince any that, in requiring faith, the gospel is exercising the functions of a moral economy ; for

it is addressing men as accountable agents, calling upon them as beings capable of spontaneous moral actions, to seek on the terms proposed, indemnity for past transgressions, and a participation of the benefits obtained by Jesus Christ. The individual who refuses or neglects this great salvation, justly perishes, a self-destroyed rebel against both supreme authority and unparalleled grace. But since the exercise of faith is a moral act, and as such, can be performed by moral agents only, it cannot be required of infants. It is on all hands allowed, that physical incapacity exonerates from all claims for obedience. No equitable legislature can require the idiot to understand its dictates, the helpless paralytic to receive its boon, or the dead to execute its commands. The criminality of unbelief lies in a disposition not to believe, a reluctance of the heart to receive the revelations of the gospel as true, the promises of God as faithful, and the provisions of his mercy as infinitely desirable. Therefore men perish with aggravated condemnation, because they are not willing to come to Christ, that they might have life.* But infants cannot have any moral disposition. They cannot, therefore, be charged with disobedience to this requirement, and the wilful rejection of mercy; nor ought they to be classed with such as cannot enter into rest because of unbelief.

* John iii. 19, & v. 40.

It is generally allowed that want of faith in Christ will not be produced as a charge against those to whom he has not been revealed for the obedience of faith. Without entering upon any enquiries respecting the possibility of salvation to the heathen, through the mediation of an unknown Saviour, it may be fully conceded in the present argument, that all such as “have not the law, will perish without law*.” Yet, assuredly, they do not perish because they will not believe the Gospel; “for,” as the apostle asks, “how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard†?” The final condition of the heathen, then, will not be determined according to evangelical requirements, for this very reason,—because they are left destitute of evangelical instruction. Much less, therefore, can the condition of deceased infants be determined according to those requirements, since they are even under a natural incapacity of knowing and submitting to them.

No one would have the irreverence and hardness to maintain, that, even were it his good pleasure, the blessed God cannot save a dying infant. Yet such, in fact, is the case, if the exercise of faith be universally indispensable to salvation. For as infants are absolutely incapable of exercising faith, he could not then exercise his sovereign prerogative in their behalf; because he

* Rom. ii. 12. † Ib. x. 14.

would, according to this supposition, violate his own engagement revealed in the Gospel, and forfeit his character as "God who cannot lie." The supposition, then, as it clearly implies too much, must be as incorrect in fact, as it is revolting in form: when the Gospel requires faith as indispensable to salvation, it cannot be understood as contemplating infants, whose condition in eternity, is not, therefore, to be determined agreeably to the terms which it proposes for moral agents.

Divine requirements always respect the natural capabilities of those on whom they are laid; and hence, how unlimited soever in terms, must be understood as admitting some restriction. Thus, the apostolical injunction, "If any will not work, neither should he eat," is clearly inapplicable to such as are physically incapable of labouring for subsistence: it is not equivalent to a sentence of starvation on the aged, the sick, the infant members of society. Neither is the denunciation, "He that believeth not shall be damned," to be considered as dooming to inevitable destruction, any who lie under a natural incapacity of believing.

If, however, the Gospel be considered as a development of the purpose and proceedings of God for the salvation of his elect, we are led into a view of the subject something different from the above. Under this view, it teaches that the Holy Spirit prepares men for eternal life, by dis-

posing them to embrace its overtures, and enabling them to fulfil its requirements, considered as a moral economy. Thus the favoured subjects of divine influence are inclined and prepared to receive the spiritual blessings provided, and to fulfil the holy duties enjoined, as these may be severally brought before the rational faculties. This disposition in general, as well as certain modifications of its influence, appears to be called *faith*; and hence the varied, comprehensive, and mighty operations, attributed to faith in the Sacred Volume.

Dr. Owen, therefore, describing the views of those who maintain justification by faith alone, observes: "They believe—1. That faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God; yea, that it is a grace wrought in the hearts of men by the exceeding greatness of his power.—2. That this grace is in them a principle of spiritual life; which, *in the habit of it, as resident in the heart, is not really distinguished from that of all other grace whereby we live to God**." And divines in general, distinguish between habitual and actual faith, or between the principle in the heart, and the exercise of the principle. While the exercise of the principle, as required in order to salvation, is "the receiving and resting upon Christ, as freely offered in the Gospel," the principle itself is the new nature, considered in its respect to divine revelations; it is,

* On Justification, chap. ii. p. 170. edit. 1760.

if the expression may be allowed, a moral faculty, an aptness, a readiness, to receive divine declarations as true, divine promises as faithful, divine provisions and appointments as good. Like our rational faculties, therefore, its energies are exerted, accordingly as the various subjects of revelation are presented to its acceptance.

In this respect especially, faith is “the operation of God,” “the gift of God,” the immediate production of Almighty power*; and is most intimately connected with salvation. The exercises of faith appear to be as much the acts of a man under the influence of his new nature, as any intellectual operation is his act under the influence of his rational nature. These will unquestionably take place in proportion as opportunities are presented; but to make salvation depend upon any specific acts of faith, considered in distinction from its principle, is to attribute the blessing immediately to ourselves, contrary to the express doctrine of scripture, and inconsistently with the axiom, that moral actions take their denomination as good or evil, from the disposition whence they proceed. The exercises of faith vary indefinitely with the measure and accuracy of individuals’ acquaintance with revealed truth, but the nature and tendency of the principle is in all believers the same. From the difference of advantages, there appears a great difference between faith,

* Col. ii. 12. Eph. ii. 8; i. 19.

as exercised by Old Testament and New Testament believers, or by Christians of varying intellectual and educational endowments ; but considered as the principle of spiritual life, it is in all “ like precious faith;” here emphatically, though not in the apostolical sense of the expression, there is “ one faith.”

If faith be considered in this view, nothing appears to be hazarded by affirming that it is universally indispensable to salvation ; but then also it leaves no discouragement to our hopes for deceased infants, who, even from their birth, may as easily be endowed with this moral faculty, as with any rational faculty essential to their nature. The same gracious influence can bestow a “ divine nature” on unconscious infants, to grow with their growth, and strengthen with their strength, as it does on sinners mature in years and in crimes, to subdue their evil propensities, and impart to their souls a holy bias. This endowment was conferred on Adam at his creation, and if the case may be supposed—had he retained his original character, it would undoubtedly have been conferred, at the first moment of existence, on all his descendants.

Nor is there wanting good authority to conclude, that it has been thus graciously communicated to some of his degenerate offspring. “ Before I formed thee in the belly,” said the Lord to Jeremiah, “ I knew thee ; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained

thee a prophet to the nations*.” This declaration, indeed, immediately affirms his pre-appointment to the prophetic office; but it seems to imply a bestowment of the grace necessary to the faithful discharge of that office. Concerning John the Baptist, the divine promise is direct and unequivocal; “He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb†.” We have no reason to suppose that, in these cases, there was any preternatural development of the energies of human nature. Both Jeremiah and John arrived, in the ordinary course, at moral agency, and the exercise of that holy principle with which they were endowed from their birth.

Now if, in the interim, they were in a state of salvation, and if, dying before capable of moral action, they would have been happy, the inference is obvious,—infants, though incapable of exercising faith, are yet capable of all that, in their case, is necessary to salvation. Therefore, the terms of the Gospel addressed to men, do not preclude our hopes, that through the mediation of Christ, departed infants are made partakers of blessings which they could not appreciate, and their participation of which they could not evince, during their transient sojourn on this side of eternity.

* Jer. i. 5.

† Luke i. 15.

SECTION V.

Indications of infantile Depravity, not conclusive against their Salvation.

The appearances of moral depravity in infants distressing; to be judged of with much caution. These not inconsistent with hopes respecting them,—for they are supposed incapable of personal sin;—similar evils are found in good men; sometimes to a great degree. That infants do not repent, does not affect the argument.

A HEART enduring the solicitude of affection, will not be tranquillized until another cause of disquietude is removed. The operations of depraved nature in infants are often discoverable, to an extent very painful and alarming to a pious and benevolent observer, and have sometimes continued as far along the awful passage to eternity, as human observation could trace them. Hence, there have many times arisen the suggestions of a holy jealousy, whether these indications of depravity did not afford decisive evidence, that the lamented sufferers remained still uninfluenced by renewing grace.

Facts of this nature are commonly appealed to by advocates for the doctrine of original sin; nor is it intended to deny, altogether, the validity of reasonings, which have been constructed from them. It must, however, be conceded to those who have

questioned the force of such appeals, that much caution and discrimination are requisite, to distinguish, in many instances, between the operations of unholy tempers, and the instinctive impulses of afflicted nature. Those cries and tears, which create alarm, may not unfrequently be mere expressions of uneasiness, the only ones, or at least the most natural ones, which the little helpless sufferer can employ. It will occur to the recollection of many a vigilant observer, that emotions which at the time were considered paroxysms of passion, were afterwards discovered to proceed from paroxysms of pain; and the well-meant chastisement which was intended for self-willed stubbornness, in reality augmented the agonies of a little creature, writhing under tortures which it could not reveal. Besides, various inferior animals put forth indications of feeling similar to these supposed operations of a sinful nature. There may be found among the brute creation, many things very like vanity, pride, rage, revenge, malignity, self-will; yet we do not attribute these to the influence of principles morally evil. Wherein lies the difference between such brutal instincts, and the emotions of infants, it appears at least difficult to specify; but the above facts are too clear to admit a doubt, and strongly evince the uncertainty of any conclusion resting on the ground of disquietude now under consideration.

And it must be kept in view, that infants are on all hands allowed, not at present to have arrived at moral agency, and, therefore, not to be capable of personal transgression. If these operations of nature be not accountable actions, if they be not criminal before the righteous Judge, though they ought to be matter of regret and humiliation, they ought not to be considered as a cause of alarm.

To obtain yet further relief from anxiety on this head, let us only estimate the condition of infants, as we do the state and character of adults whose piety is held unquestionable. For ascertaining the presence of holy principles in ourselves or others, we do not judge it indispensable that all principles of an opposite tendency should be exterminated, or at the least so far subdued as never effectually to put forth their energy. We do not renounce all hope of interest in spiritual blessings, because we not only feel the presence, but sometimes are betrayed into the expression, of unholy tempers and desires. This is evident from the contrite acknowledgments of an eminently holy man, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin in my members;" and from the sympathising emotion with which we often adopt his exclamation, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death*?"

* Rom. vii. 23, 24.

To what a lamentable extent is moral imperfection discoverable in Christians, even at the most advanced stages of their probationary course! What an obvious influence of unholy motives, interfering with their best endeavours to discharge incumbent duty! What backwardness of heart to execute the deed which conscience approves as good! What facility of yielding to temptation, without unremitting vigilance and self-denial! What consequent irregularities of temper and practice! and sometimes what grievous falls into gross and most offensive sins! And yet there may remain upon the whole, satisfactory reason for concluding, that such persons are subjects of renewing grace. Why then should the supposed discovery of these evils, in a much inferior degree, wholly preclude our hopes respecting deceased infants? Why may not a renewed nature subsist in them also with similar infirmities?

Our favourable judgment of Christians subject to such imperfections, rests, indeed, on evidence of their humiliation and repentance; and this, it is granted, we have not in the case of infants. But this exception does not affect the precise point of consideration, which is, whether we can suppose that departed infants were the subjects of a renewed nature, when there appeared in them so many indications of unholy principles. The appeal to experience clearly shews that much tendency to

moral evil is found in the subjects of regenerating grace. Were it certain, therefore, that the expressions of feeling produced by infants, are genuine operations of moral depravity, they do not warrant a conclusion decisive against their future happiness. And much less are we driven to such a conclusion, when taking into account the great and perhaps unavoidable uncertainty, whether those emotions partook in any degree of a moral nature.

SECTION VI.

Those who die in Infancy may be capable of heavenly Felicity.

The happiness of heaven intellectual and moral,—hence a difficulty.—

This not insuperable :—Our *conceptions* of moral and spiritual truths analogical, which appears from reflection and revelation ;—and too imperfect to avail much in eternity ;—therefore infants under little disadvantage ;—and what they need, rapidly, perhaps intuitively, supplied. *Moral* preparation for heaven, in the disposition ;—in infants may be instantaneous ;—as sometimes nearly so in adults ;—therefore deceased infants capable of felicity.

To some contemplative minds, deeply interested in the present question, there yet remains a consideration sufficiently disheartening. It is this. The happiness of heaven is intellectual and moral. By the very hypothesis, it is therefore beyond the possibility of infantine enjoyment. How then can they, who were naturally unable to receive and partake of evangelical manifestations on earth, be capable of sharing the consummation of those manifestations in heaven? Do not the causes which precluded them from the former, necessarily operate to their exclusion from the latter?

Our present opportunities of acquiring some knowledge of divine realities, justly claim constant and devout gratitude ; ought to be prized as an inestimable treasure ; and should be diligently improved

for promoting, in ourselves and others, superior qualification for present duties and eternal happiness.

There is, however, some danger of attaching too great importance to mere intellectual acquirements respecting divine things. For proficiency in these, is, obviously, compatible with an awful destitution of that moral influence on the character, which they ought to promote. And it further may be doubted, whether, under any circumstances, the ideas of spiritual things which we acquire in the present life, be sufficiently representative of the realities, to avail us much on our actual introduction to the world of spirits.

Our present ideas of moral and spiritual truths are mere analogies, of which the archetypes are objects of sense. A careful analysis of our conceptions will easily discover this fact. Hence it is, that where we can fix on no analogy, we cease to conceive, and implicitly deduce from the divine veracity, convictions of the truth of uncomprehended announcements. By a borrowed light of this kind, we form some conception of our natural obligations to God, through those of subjects to their legitimate sovereign; and of the malignity of sin, through the conduct of rebels against a wise and beneficent exercise of authority. In this glass, our introduction to the divine favour through Jesus Christ, and our final acquittal in judgment, come before the mind under the forms of judicial

proceedings; fellowship with God is pictured, in the personal intercourse of children with a justly revered parent; secular majesty, divested of all imperfections and limitations, becomes an image of the Supreme; and the Redeemer's personal presence in heaven, is anticipated as uninterrupted converse with a friend whom unseen and distant we greatly loved.

On this principle are the discoveries of revelation constructed. There, the heavenly state is described as a family, of which our glorified Redeemer is the head; as a city, whose blessed inhabitants enjoy their immunities and privileges under his immediate administration; as a court, where he sits enthroned, and grants to the adoring and enraptured myriads of his subjects, unrestrained access to his unveiled glories. In whatever degree these and similar descriptions may approach towards the reality, they are still but a series of emblems.

Under such a view does the Apostle teach us to estimate our present knowledge of heavenly things. "Now, we see through a glass darkly (*ἐν αἰνίγματι*); but then, face to face.*" "We are said to see things at present," observes Macknight, "in an ænigma; because in the revelations of God, invisible things are represented by visible, and spiritual things by natural, and eternal things by such as are

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

temporal.—When this life is over, and the grand scenes of the heavenly world open upon us, we shall no more see spiritual things darkly, as in a riddle, but we shall see them face to face.—In short, we shall leave off all those *imperfect methods* of acquiring knowledge which we made use of on earth.”

Imperfect indeed! Valuable they certainly are, because the best, the only present means of receiving impressions respecting what “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard;” yet daily experience proves their inadequacy. We find innumerable occasions, on which it is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to acquire, through these alone, the precise conception of another. Sympathy, or similar experience, seems indispensable to the intercourse of minds. If, by a series of emblems as much superior to those of Quarles as human invention can delineate, any one should endeavour to illustrate the nature of experimental religion,—a stranger to the holy exercises of which it consists, will, after ingenuity has exhausted its resources for his information, principally learn that experimental religion is something of which he can form no distinct conception. Whatever advantages he may possibly derive from the benevolent attempts of his instructor, it can scarcely be perceived, wherein another person who had not employed those emblems would be less prepared than he, to enter on a course of experimental religion.

Such is the nature of our ideal efforts, our intellectual preparations for the heavenly state, considered apart from their influence in the formation of character. It may be considered, therefore, a task for minds of more than ordinary perspicacity, to detect any disadvantages under which the disembodied spirit of an infant necessarily lies, for entering on the science of the eternal world.

Even from its earliest existence, a human soul possesses the elements of intelligence. It is not actually knowing, because, through the imperfections of the body with which it is united, the media of knowledge are as yet obstructed; and because, being destitute of experience, it has not as yet acquired a stock of analogies. The infant soul is a golden lamp ready prepared for the oil and the kindling touch, but communication with the source of supply is obstructed; when the imperfect medium is removed, and the oil and flame are immediately applied, it at once bursts forth into destined and immortal effulgence.

Though the knowledge of disembodied spirits should not be intuitive, it must be considered a probable supposition, that the space of one hour's possession will better initiate them into the mysteries of heaven,—the space of one hour's experience of the Saviour's immediate presence, will better enable them to conceive its glories, than the persevering sagacity of Newton could, in the present state,

were it occupied under the highest advantages, for the years of Methusalem.

But heavenly bliss is chiefly of a moral kind, and therefore can be enjoyed by those beings only whose dispositions are conformed to its engagements. To produce this conformity, is the ultimate use of present knowledge. In other words, the chief value of intellectual attainments, even respecting divine things, lies in their tendency to subserve the formation of moral habits. This process, however, would require no time nor struggles, no vigilance nor labours, were we not encumbered by the perpetual avocations of worldly cares, and impeded by the evil propensities which time and indulgence had previously fostered. But for these impediments, the character would be formed at once, by the predominating principle introduced into the soul: there would be the same hungering and thirsting after righteousness, as there is in the healthy body for corporal sustenance; and the same uniformity of holy temper and conduct in the one, as there is of respiration and pulse in the other.

Now, in the case of infants, these secular impediments do not occur, to thwart their course; nor have unholy propensities been formed in them, to require such a counteracting and reiterated impulse. The reason, therefore, which may be philosophically assigned for the progressive sanctification of adults, will not apply to them; no intermediate step seems

wanting between their regeneration and their meetness for glory.

And were it otherwise, the divine power could unquestionably assimilate their dispositions to the engagements of heaven, by a single impulse of the new-creating Spirit. The omnipotent energy of divine influence has been sometimes illustrated in the almost instantaneous transformation of mature sinners. Though suspicion generally broods over a death-bed repentance, yet a few such cases have occurred which banish scepticism. And he who, within a very short interval, exchanged blasphemies of the dying Redeemer, for believing prayer, is one instance of a vessel of wrath apparently fitted for destruction, becoming, nearly in a moment, a vessel of mercy prepared for glory. If, in reference to Almighty power, a comparison of more or less difficult were not wholly irrelevant, we might be disposed to venture the reflection,—how much easier, in a moment, to prepare for heaven a thousand dying infants, than in so short a time, to work the mighty change in one such dying malefactor! It is, however, more appropriate to remark, that from his case it appears, that progressive transformation of character is usually effected in the heirs of heaven, for some other reason than because the gradual formation of moral habits, is necessary to qualify them for its enjoyment.

It appears, then, that no necessity of nature lies

against the happiness of infants departing from the present life. Something more than imagination suggests, that before the first gush of parental tenderness ceases to bedew the mortal remains of their little emancipated sufferer, its immortal part has sprung up into a stature of intelligence and moral dignity, far transcending the puny attainments of mortals ; that it already expatiates with delight amidst scenes which their sublimest flights have never reached, and dwells in the full radiance of that uncreated splendour, which they vainly endeavour to comprehend by the dim and partial reflections that have glanced on this lower world.

Here, it may be advisable to pause, and review the progress of the argument. To some readers, anxious for a speedy resolution of their doubts, this may appear but small ; because, as is readily conceded, the harmony of the opinion advocated, with acknowledged facts, and with the system of revealed doctrines, constitutes no positive evidence of its truth. Let it, however, be remembered, that the salvation of all children dying in infancy, is pleaded for, not as matter of explicit revelation, but of rational opinion sanctioned by revelation. A prime office of reason in moral questions, is, to submit itself to divine instructions ; and where these cannot be obtained, to bring its opinions to the test of the instructions that have been afforded ; convinced that

what is inconsistent with them, must be erroneous, however plausible. That opinion cannot be true, which, to appear so, requires the subversion, or the mutilation, of an infallible testimony. On this principle, then, our advance, if not rapid, has been correct; if we have not reached the goal, we have thus far kept the course.

And a devout heart, deeply interested in the enquiry, will probably allow that something more has been accomplished. For in proportion as the preceding reasonings have produced conviction, they must have produced relief. If, therefore, the superstructure of hope has not been built, nor even its foundations laid, yet obstructions have been removed, and the surface has been levelled. Perhaps too, having heard the gracious acquittal, "Neither do I condemn thee," our hearts may be better prepared for the more cheering dismissal, "Go in peace." If this have been accomplished, if it appear that some of the most sublime and awful truths do not give just occasion for alarm, we have at least the consolation of knowing, that, in the present case, our affections as parents do not revolt at our deference to divine authority; and that our feelings as men, may comport with our duty as Christians.

PART THE SECOND.

THE HAPPINESS OF DECEASED INFANTS STRONGLY
SUGGESTED BY VARIOUS DOCTRINES AND FACTS
OF DIVINE REVELATION.

AFTER the concessions already made, none, it is presumed, will entertain a hope of finding in the remaining part of the discussion, more satisfaction than the title just announced may warrant them to expect. We have not the means of establishing an unhesitating conviction that departed infants are certainly happy, by a direct appeal to divine testimony, nor by evident and necessary deduction from the announcements of revelation. All we can expect is, by deductions more remote and of various degrees of evidence, to obtain some encouraging grounds to hope, that it is well with them. As our honest convictions cannot surpass evidence, where evidence is merely probable, we can arrive at only probable conclusions. And after all that can be gleaned from the field of revelation, anxious piety would repose with more tranquillity on one express testimony from God himself, than on the most elaborate and apparently unexceptionable process of induction. Indeed the very fact, that a labori-

ous process is necessary to obtain a conclusion, suggests to reflecting minds the uncertainty of that conclusion; for notwithstanding the greatest care, and the most honest application of our reason, such is its present imperfect state, that in proportion as its exertions are necessary, its results are uncertain. This sentiment lays a timely check on presumptuous confidence, and teaches us at the outset, to pursue our course with the modesty of diffidence, and with a sense of dependance upon Him, whose influence is promised to lead devout enquirers into all the truth.

The stations which we have to occupy are distinct and various. Several doctrines and facts of divine revelation, contribute, in different proportions, their assistance to our enquiries. This, however, is far from being a disadvantage to the argument; for the more those points of view are multiplied, from which we examine whether a given object lies within the circumference of truth, the nearer must be our approaches to full conviction. Every accession thus gained, is valuable; it is a new witness on the subject of investigation, who, though his evidence in itself should be far from conclusive, may yet subserve the cause, by corroborating the clearer and more important evidence of others.

Through the whole remaining part of our proceedings, two things must be borne in mind.—The argument is strictly cumulative; its force therefore

lies not in the validity of any particular part, but in the aggregate. Though some points have considerably more weight than others which may be adduced, yet not only the whole, but the most weighty portions are considered at a disadvantage if separated from the mass,—if deprived of the accessory evidence afforded by less impressive points. Some constellations more than others, may relieve and direct the traveller's midnight journey; but his whole advantage lies in the blended effulgence of the starry heavens.—And further, it should be kept in view, that though some parts of the argument may possibly fail to impress an individual mind, contributing little or nothing to produce conviction in him, they may have a different aspect to a mind differently constituted, or contemplating them under the influence of different, though equally warrantable associations. At all events, the failure of one point does not invalidate any other, but merely detracts from the whole that weight which it has been supposed to possess.

Taking with us these reflections, if the opinion here advocated should appear fairly inferable from various distinct and important announcements of Holy Scripture, while—as we have seen in the former part—it harmonizes with the system of revealed truth in general, we shall probably obtain as much satisfaction, as from the nature of the case we have any reason to expect.

SECTION I.

The revealed character of God, a ground of hope for the happiness of deceased Infants.

God revealed—in his **RELATIVE CHARACTER** as supreme ruler;—his government regulated by *equity* which cannot injure, and by *sovereignty* which is essentially benevolent;—infants not amenable to justice;—therefore dealt with in sovereignty—which requires their happiness;—this reconcilable with—natural and spiritual evils of time—not, with those of eternity;—with the condition of personal sinners;—with “visiting the iniquities of the fathers;”—with the sufferings of the innocent Jesus;—hence, the relative character of God encourages our hopes.

His **MORAL CHARACTER**; though holy he delights in mercy;—therefore exercises it as far as his honour allows;—Infants not excluded from mercy, by personal rejection;—nor by sins hypothetically future;—their temporal sufferings do not oppose the argument.

His **NEW COVENANT CHARACTER**, as in Christ;—he thus regulates the death and eternal condition of infants;—Jesus Christ a representative of the divine character;—Christ’s regard to children generally adverted to as encouraging our hopes. Conclusion.

EXERCISING supreme and uncontrollable dominion over the universe, the adorable Jehovah “doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; none can stay his hand, nor say unto him, what dost thou?” Or should there arise some presumptuous being prepared to question his right, such daring would be as easily repelled, as the murmuring of those

discontented labourers, whose eye was evil because their master's was good.* “May I not do what I will with *mine own*?” must effectually put to silence the petulance and arrogance of reason, venturing to arraign the divine proceedings, and to sit in judgment on the universal Sovereign and Benefactor. This supremacy of God we rejoice to acknowledge, and all its administrations would awfully reverence and adore.

But supremacy is only a relative attribute of Deity, it merely indicates his relation to creatures as the universal Ruler, leaving undefined the qualities of his government, which depend of course upon his character. As the administrations of an earthly potentate, so far as they are the result of his own pleasure, are regulated by his moral dispositions; so must be those of the blessed God. Holy and benevolent in himself, he is just and good to all his creatures. The divine perfections chiefly illustrated in the government of man as intelligent and accountable, are, justice and grace, or equity and sovereign benevolence.

“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” may be considered as a question directly replied to in the language of inspiration, “The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” Hence, he injures none; he administers to none

* Matt. xx. 11—15.

less of good, or more of evil, than is deserved. On the other hand, we are taught that "the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." Hence, he administers more of good and less of evil, than is deserved. Had we not been guided by his own declaration, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," we might nevertheless have readily concluded that the exercise of divine benevolence must be sovereign, or the mere result of his own pleasure, because if the objects had a meritorious claim, it must be an exercise of justice; equally may we conclude that the exercise of sovereignty must be benevolent, because as it cannot trench on the province of justice so as to injure, nor be the same as justice so as to bestow exactly what equity demands, the only alternative is, that it operate to bless the undeserving.

It appears, therefore, that suffering results to any creature from the administration of divine equity, and undeserved happiness from the administration of sovereign benevolence.*

* Instead of pursuing any further the illustration of these important topics, I beg leave to refer to "An Essay on the Equity of the Divine Government, and the Sovereignty of Divine Grace," by the late Dr. Edward Williams, who, by his excellencies as a man and a christian, secured himself a place in the hearts of all who knew him, and, by his labours as a divine, conferred on the church incalculable benefits, which may be expected to increase in proportion as his views on the present subject especially, are understood and maintained.

In dealing with individuals according to strict equity, the righteous Governor of the universe treats them according to their deeds, whether they have been good or evil. But as infants are, by hypothesis, incapable of either moral good or evil, they cannot in equity deserve either happiness or misery. The ills which they endure in the present state proceeding by natural consequence from the relations in which they are placed, equity does not require them to be superseded; for as they have not done evil to deserve punishment, so neither have they done good to merit favour at the divine hand. In fact, to conceive of infants as subject to the administrations of distributive justice, is to conceive of them as moral agents, a character which they are naturally incapable of sustaining.

As the only alternative, we might therefore conclude, that the conduct of God towards infants, is an exercise of his prerogative as the Supreme Ruler, that is, he deals with them in sovereignty. Such a conclusion is indeed demanded by the obvious facts of the case. By the sovereign pleasure of God, they are brought into existence; by a sovereign constitution they inherit the nature of fallen Adam, and are liable to sufferings and death; and by a sovereign act they are individually removed from the present state, before they become personal transgressors. But if the condition of infants be thus altogether at the disposal of divine sovereignty,

they must be happy; for as we have lately seen, that sovereignty cannot injure, is essentially benevolent, and wherever it operates, operates but to bless.

Existence is given as a blessing, and one cannot but conceive, continues to be such until perverted by personal transgression, when it remains—as blessings abused become the occasions of heaviest woe—a mere capacity of enduring righteous retribution. There is therefore considerable ground for the opinion, that He who endowed infants with a nature capable of enjoying himself, the chief good; who, according to his pleasure, placed them in circumstances which justly exposed them to sufferings and death; and who removed them from those circumstances before they had personally forfeited that chief good, will not render them eternally wretched, by withholding it on the ground of what must be considered their affliction rather than their sin.

Nor do the evils incident to infants in this world, suggest any valid reason for questioning either the correctness of the principles, or the legitimacy of the conclusion just laid down. Intentions of the purest benevolence may expose a being to unavoidable distress for the present, as an occasion of producing ultimate and permanent happiness. Thus, believers in Christ, whose felicity is inseparably connected with the highest end of God, are now

subject to afflictions, which are working out for them “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” That any one may become interested in the happiness provided for Adam’s fallen posterity, he must be introduced into their condition, and that condition essentially includes the sufferings which infants endure. This consideration shews, not only that the evils which they endure may proceed from benevolent intentions towards them, but that according to the present constitution of things, it cannot be conceived how the highest purposes of mercy respecting them could be otherwise accomplished. And while a gracious and overwhelming compensation is thus made for all their woes, further important designs are promoted, in the moral discipline administered to parents, and to the reflecting part of mankind in general.

On the same principle we perceive how, in full harmony with its essential benevolence, divine sovereignty may introduce the posterity of fallen man into existence under spiritual death. This also is essentially the condition of those for whom Christ came, “that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” What the Apostle observes respecting the death and resurrection of genuine Christians, we may apply to the spiritual condition of those who die in infancy. “As in Adam all die,” by a destitution of the holy principles indispensable to final happiness; “so in

Christ all are made alive," by the gracious compensation provided in the arrangements of sovereign benevolence.

The temporal evils endured by infants, are therefore easily reconcilable with the above statements and reasonings; for "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed," and to which they are a necessary introduction. But no compensation can be made for eternal death; that evil cannot be employed as an occasion, of producing greater ultimate good. If then infants deceased be finally miserable, either divine sovereignty is not essentially benevolent, or their misery must proceed from some other principle of the divine government. The latter part of the alternative would refer us to Justice, which they were incapable of offending; and the former would, as we have seen, identify the exercise of the divine prerogative with a conduct which it were impious in the last degree to ascribe to Infinite Excellence.

Every individual does indeed receive existence and the continuance of life by an act of divine sovereignty; but his case differs from that of infants, from the moment when he becomes a personal transgressor. Sinners abuse the blessing of existence, and thus become amenable to judicial retribution. Left to the consequences of their sin, they will be inevitably and eternally miserable; but

unless punishment be arbitrarily inflicted, infants can endure none. The final condemnation of sinners will manifest the righteousness of God, justifying his procedure, not only in the view of other creatures, but in the consciences of the condemned; but if infants be condemned, it appears inconceivable how the righteousness of God should be manifested in the view of other creatures, or how they themselves should endure a sense of guilt, unless under a false impression, which is as abhorrent to justice as to benevolence.

When God so awfully declares that he will "visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children," nothing more may be intended, than that, on account of the sins of the parents, temporal calamities shall befall their offspring. This, we know, is an ordinary procedure in the course of Providence, and has sometimes been awfully exemplified in desolating judgments; in the destruction of infants at the deluge; in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; in the indiscriminate slaughter of the Canaanites, and afterwards of the Amalekites. But all these visitations of divine indignation upon the crimes of parents, are perfectly compatible with designs of mercy to infants themselves, on the principle lately illustrated. Even on the supposition, that more than temporal calamities is intended, the most judicious writers agree, that the denunciation is fulfilled only on those children who,

by imitating the vices, give a sanction to the crimes of their parents. The following passage is quoted as a correct specimen of the views and reasonings generally adopted.

“God says, he brings evil on the children and posterity of wicked parents, as the consequence of their iniquity. It hence is evident that the moral character of the children of wicked parents, is by divine constitution, affected, formed, and fixed by, or in consequence of the parent’s iniquity, who are enemies to him: for God has declared, that the child who does not imitate his father in his iniquity, shall not suffer for his father’s wickedness.* The words cited from the second commandment are not repealed or contradicted by this passage in Ezekiel, as some have suggested, but are explained; and hereby we learn, that visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon their children, does not intend punishing the children for the iniquity of their fathers, whatever be the moral character and conduct of the children, and though they abhor and renounce their father’s iniquity, and fear and love God. But their moral character is supposed to be like their wicked father; and it is necessarily implied in the iniquity of their father being visited upon them, that they shall not renounce, but approve of the sins of their father, and suffer natural evil or punishment, for their own

* Ezek. xviii. 1—20.

disposition and conduct, and because their moral character and conduct is like their father's. Hence it appears, that the moral character of the children of wicked parents, is the consequence of the iniquity of their parents, and is formed by it as the foundation of the natural evil which they suffer; and that this is meant by visiting the iniquity of the fathers, who hate God, upon their children. These fathers do hand down, and entail to their children, their iniquity, or their own moral character; as there is no other possible way, in which their iniquity can be visited upon their children*."

On either of these interpretations, the divine arrangement leaves unobstructed both our hopes for the happiness of deceased infants, and the general principle by which they are supported. If the former be preferred, it appears evident that their temporal calamities may even be a merciful administration, subservient to their eternal welfare; and if the latter, this proceeding is not an exercise of sovereignty, but arises out of the general and esta-

* Hopkins, *American*, "System of Doctrines," Vol. II. pp. 265, 266. See also Calvin, "Institut. lib. ii. cap. 8, sec. 20;" Durham, "Exposition of the Ten Commandments," p. 117; Barrow, "Exposition of the Decalogue," pp. 400, 401; and especially Jamieson, "Use of Sacred History," Vol. II. pp. 138—141. Of the last work it is not too much to say, that though it may not call for unqualified approbation, it has received less attention than it deserves.

blished constitution of things, while it further leaves unaffected such children of wicked persons as do not imitate their parents' crimes.

Nor do even the sufferings of our innocent and holy Redeemer suggest an exception to the benevolence of sovereign operations ; both because he voluntarily assumed human nature and guilt—a fact which the Sacred Records so strongly represent to be indispensable to his effectual mediation*, and also because an eternal recompense was provided for his temporary and voluntary humiliation†. No ground therefore can be supplied by this illustrious instance for supposing, that by an act of divine sovereignty, ultimate sufferings may be awarded to beings personally innocent.

It appears, then, that the most awful perfections of the divine nature, when duly considered, minister encouragement to our hopes for departed infants. Were they amenable to justice, they would endure no more sufferings hereafter than their crimes deservedly entail ; but in fact, their whole existence on this side eternity is regulated by sovereignty ;—that sovereignty is essentially benevolent, the source of unnumbered blessings to the unworthy, but of punishment to none, nor even of temporary woes, except as measures pregnant with greater ultimate

* Heb. ii. 14—18. John x. 17.

† Isa. liii. 10. Heb. xii. 2.

advantage. In those gracious hands which are extended but to bless, which deal out all our present comforts and all our everlasting hopes, do our infant offspring lie. Can we then do otherwise than hope that their few and evil days are crowned with "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?"

The adorable Jehovah is however pleased most frequently and fully to reveal himself, not as invested with the awful insignia of supreme and uncontrollable authority, but in the kind and condescending forms of paternal benignity and love. To humble the proud, repel the presumptuous, or alarm the insensible, he occasionally comes forth, riding on the whirlwind of his power, thundering with the voice of his excellency, and piercing the thick darkness with rays of uncreated splendour from the light inaccessible. But he delights to reveal himself in the small still voice. The Lord's glory is his goodness. Hence, when Moses intreated, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," the condescending reply was, "I will cause my goodness to pass before thee." "And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty*."

* Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

The beloved disciple has, in two concise expressions, given us a description of the moral character of God, strictly accordant with the above, and sufficiently comprehensive: "God is light,"—"God is love*." Holiness and benevolence, which comprise the character of Jehovah, correspond respectively to justice and sovereignty, which are the principles of his government.

While there appears good reason to conclude, that holiness does not abhor where justice does not condemn, every modification under which God exercises his love to the fallen race of mankind, is calculated to encourage our hopes for departed infants. "The Father of mercies, and God of all consolation," "who delighteth in mercy," "who is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish," who from the treasures of his all-sufficiency takes pleasure in diffusing happiness through the universe,—will, as of course, dispense that blessing wherever the honour of his character and government allow. That ocean of benevolence will flow wherever no daring front of sin opposes its course, or lifts the self-complacent soul above the constituted level of its influence. No such daring front have the helpless creatures whose cause we are pleading presented against the course of divine benevolence: they never said, "Who is the

* 1 John i. 5, and iv. 16.

Lord that I should obey him?" they never shut up their hearts in unbelief; they never rejected the counsel of God against themselves, nor despised the "riches of his goodness, long-suffering, and forbearance." Can it be thought, that He, whose tender mercies are over all his works, produces creatures with a nature capable of eternal and ineffable happiness, only that he may snatch them from the possibility of obtaining it, and doom them to a perdition, as eternal and ineffable? Do the suppositions harmonize, that the universal Benefactor "taketh care for oxen," and "heareth the young ravens when they cry;" yet exercises no compassion on beings whose natural endowments must render them unspeakably wretched without his favour? Is it possible, that he who willeth not the death of any sinner, should be swift to destroy those who have never personally offended?

True indeed, had their lives been prolonged, they would become transgressors; and every sin to which their evil nature, unrestrained by divine grace, would on such a supposition impel them, lay before infinite intelligence, which sees things that are not as though they were. This consideration might possibly suggest a reason against their existence, before they began to be; but cannot, for their necessary exclusion from the only happiness of their nature, after they have begun to be. The divine estimate of creatures is formed according to what they are, not

according to what without gracious interference they would become. To suppose the contrary, is monstrous; it is to suppose, that He who delighteth in mercy, lays to the charge of his creatures every instance of iniquity which, without preventing goodness, they would commit, in every imaginable condition;—it is to suppose, that every possible sin must be charged upon every accountable creature. Yet even this supposition is but an equivalent to the other, that perhaps infants may be excluded from mercy, because had not death intervened, they would, if left without divine grace, have excluded themselves.

It is needless to repeat, that the temporary sufferings of infants are consistent with their interest in everlasting mercy. Exempted from misery, they had been placed beyond the province of mercy. But from the fruit of the forbidden tree, Infinite Wisdom has extracted a potion, bitter indeed, but salutary; and the hand of a compassionate Father so administers it to them, as to prevent a paroxysm evidently approaching, and without extraordinary recourse most certainly fatal.

Nor ought we to overlook the cheering consideration, that He who arbitrates in the affairs, and decides the eternal condition of mankind, is God in Christ; that He who loved us and gave himself for us, is invested with all authority in heaven and in earth, and has the keys of Hades and death. The

life and death of infants therefore are under the administration of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The dominion which as Mediator he exercises over the world, is indeed subordinate and delegated, being administered according to the prescription of the divine decree. But, surely, none can extort from this fact a conjecture, that, fettered by the restrictions of delegated power, our glorified Redeemer is unable to indulge his native benevolence. That lovely compassion and tenderness, which formed so conspicuous a feature of his character on earth, was but an irradiation from "the excellent glory." "I and the Father," said he, "are one." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also." In the moral excellencies of Jesus, the perfections of Deity were embodied; the Invisible became obvious to the senses, and the Incomprehensible submitted his virtues to the contemplation of men. Full of love and grace, he appeared but as became "the only-begotten of the Father," "the brightness of the Father's glory, and express image of his person." Now, without enlarging here, on a thought which will occur again, can it be imagined for a moment, that, to such little creatures as the condescending Jesus folded in his bosom and blessed, he opens the gates of death, that he may cast them unpitied into the horrors of the dark profound? Assuredly no: is a reply which neither our judgment nor our heart can repress; for his

benignity and condescension on earth were only a "dim transparency" of the glory that beams from his everlasting throne.

Such is a general view of the divine character and government in their bearings on the question before us, which the tenor of revelation conveys. And if the sovereignty of the universal Ruler is his prerogative of exercising mercy, and in that exercise of mercy he delights;—if the blessed Jesus presides over the present and eternal condition of mankind, and his character is an exhibition of divine perfections;—if also, the honours of moral government do not require the exclusion of deceased infants from his everlasting presence, we have some substantial ground on which to rest our opinion and build our hopes, that He who gave them being has crowned and consummated that being with the blessedness for which it is adapted.

SECTION II.

Various expressions recorded in the Scriptures of Divine regard for little Children, give further encouragement to our hopes.

These confirm the view given in the preceding Section.—A general principle explained and vindicated. Some expressions respect *children in general* or even of the wicked ;—injuries to them an aggravation of other crimes ;—their welfare made a reason for religion ;—presented as a plea for mercy ;—peculiar expressions of compassion for the children of the Ninevites.—Some expressions respect the *children of pious persons* ;—these have especial interest in divine favour ;—share spiritual blessings with their parents ;—till they reject them ;—included in covenant transactions ;—ordinances illustrating spiritual blessings appointed for them ;—are in especial relation to God ;—spiritual blessings promised to them.—Though the grounds of hope for them peculiar, not exclusive.

IF on more minute investigation it should appear that the blessed God, when adverting to little children, has discovered displeasure against them or even indifference to their welfare, there would be room to suspect the validity of reasoning on general principles, however plausible it might otherwise be considered. For after all our speculations on his character, even when they are pursued under the guidance of inspiration, it is chiefly from his conduct and declarations that we must ascertain his will. The nature of God is incomprehensible, and

the great principles of his government are only partially developed ; but his doings are for the most part accommodated to our limited capacities, and his word, the index of his intentions, is for all important purposes, definite and perspicuous.

But on a nearer approach to the light of revelation, we perceive nothing to invalidate the cheering conclusion to which the reasoning of the preceding Section conducted. All the human race are indeed declared to be “ by nature children of wrath ;” but as a full counterpart to this awful announcement, we read that “ where sin abounded, grace did much more abound : that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord*.” On this great principle alone is it, that He, who might in equity have left our infant race to the ultimate consequences of the fall, cares for their welfare, and breathes out many expressions of kindness towards them, even before they call up his paternal tenderness, or are able to lisp out at the footstool of mercy, “ Our Father which art in heaven.”

Many of the instances to this effect, which are to occupy attention, do not indeed expressly relate to the eternal welfare of children, and may therefore at first thought appear to some altogether irrelevant. That from such passages the inference is not direct

* Rom. v. 20, 21.

and necessary must be conceded ; and if it were, the character of the present question would be changed ; instead of reasoning out an opinion, we should then consider the point as an unquestionable truth, decided by infallible testimony. But whatever a first thought may suggest, it will perhaps appear on mature reflection incongruous, for God to manifest concern for the temporal happiness of those who, with respect to eternity, are under his righteous condemnation,—to express affection or even complacent regard for beings who, under the very character in which they are objects of such complacency, will be for ever banished from his presence.

Owing to the amiable sensibilities of humanity, our compassion and benevolence are often excited in opposition to the decisions of our judgment, and the sentiments of our moral nature. Hence, we pity the wicked for the tokens of his vicious course, while we condemn him on the evidence of the sufferings which excite our pity. There is nothing in the divine nature analogous to this experience. In God, complacency is purpose to bless, and compassion, readiness to relieve. If infants as such be objects of divine complacency or even compassion, it seems inconceivable that those divine regards should respect them in certain subordinate circumstances only ; that they should fix upon them while passing the threshold of existence, but leave them for ever, the moment they enter the vast interior. Surely if the

Father of Mercies has pity on infants while degradation is the very condition of their existence, he will not, without guilty cause on their part, turn his pity into wrath, where they will be capable of the high perfection and happiness for which their nature is adapted ! Surely, if he express concern for their happiness, while taking the first step into being, he will not withhold that concern through all their interminable course !

The pleadings of divine mercy with personal sinners, present us with a different case. For setting aside that they imply no complacency, as do many expressions of God's regard for infants, they are part of a moral system, intended to shew that the ruin of the finally impenitent is not chargeable on his indisposition to save, but on their own obduracy and wilful rejection of his merciful overtures. When the blessed God expostulates, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel !" or employs the language of love, reluctant to reject, but despairing to find a meet requital, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim !" then we hear the warning voice of approaching destruction,—a destruction brought upon themselves, and charged home upon their own impenitence. We are at no loss to conclude, that Israel is to die, and Ephraim is to be given up, because they have despised "the riches of the goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering" of God. No such reason can be assigned why divine mercy

should so often, and in terms so various, be expressed towards infants, and why, when it has been thus expressed, it should not be indulged to its full extent.

To devout and attentive readers of the Sacred Volume, it will readily occur, that indications of divine pity for infants are not merely occasional, or intermingled with expressions which convey sentiments of an opposite cast. References to them are currently made under forms which imply some modification of love. And though instances may be found where even their death is denounced in just indignation against the wickedness of their parents, and commission is given for the executioners of heaven to destroy their lives;* yet no expression of anger against them immediately, is in recollection, and the very denunciation of their suffering is obviously used to mark the ruinous consequences of sin, in language which implies concern for their welfare: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls, to cut off from you man and woman, *child and suckling*, out of Judah, to leave none of you to remain."†

These gracious regards are not limited to the offspring of God's acknowledged people, nor even of those who professed to be his worshippers. Sinners are reproached with injuries done to their children, as a fearful aggravation of their other

* Ezek. ix. 6.

† Jer. xliv. 7.

crimes. A passage in which Jehovah charges the rebellious Israelites with “the blood of the souls of poor innocents*,” has sometimes been adduced in illustration of this point; but it appears inapplicable, as, notwithstanding the opinion of some commentators, the structure of the sacred language requires that it should be understood of the “innocent poor.” In the writings of the same prophet, there however appears an instance as unquestionable as it is strong. “Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place *with the blood of innocents*. They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt-offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind†.” Whether or not “the blood of innocents” be interpreted, according to Grotius and Piscator, of the idolatrous infanticide practised in heathen sacrifices, is immaterial; for the following verse expressly refers to this unnatural and revolting custom, and our present concern is rather with the spirit which this language breathes. The Supremely

* Jer. ii. 34.

† Jer. xix. 3—5.

Adorable plainly associates the injuries thus inflicted on infants, with the base and daring affronts offered to his own majesty and goodness. And although occasions too often occurred for expressing his indignation at the latter, it seems as if even so monstrous a crime were capable of grievous aggravation from the former; hence, we rarely, if ever, find idolatry itself denounced in terms so adapted to thrill through the heart, and fill it with horrific apprehensions. Compassion for injured infants goads on the flashes of celestial wrath, and mercy towards them redoubles the thunders of holy indignation. Can it, then, be supposed that He who, in language so tremendous, undertook to avenge their temporal injuries, was at the same time intending to destroy them for ever!—that He left those murdered babes an eternal prey to devils, in whose obscene and sanguinary orgies their innocent blood had been shed!

That the welfare of children should be assigned as a reason of divine requirements, or, otherwise, as an inducement to obedience on the part of their parents, seems also incompatible with a supposition that their happiness is even matter of indifference to the Author of their being. Yet instances of this are too obvious and current in the Sacred Volume to render extended quotations necessary here. The following therefore may suffice: “Observe and hear all these words which I command thee,

that it may go well with thee, *and with thy children after thee, for ever*, when thou doest that which is good and right in the sight of the Lord thy God*.” “And they shall be my people, and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever; for the good of them and *of their children after them*†.” It is allowed that such passages respect posterity in general; and that in the order of moral means, the piety of parents may eminently subserve the welfare of their descendants who arrive at moral agency, in ways altogether inapplicable to infants. The question, however, is, whether such passages do not imply divine regards to the posterity of men, as such, and whether we have a warrant for excepting from those gracious regards, so large a proportion of that posterity, who never would arrive at an age capable of benefit immediately from the instructions and example of pious parents. It appears unworthy of the divine character, to suppose that such considerations imply no concern on the part of God for the happiness of children as such, and are used merely to take advantage of parental affection for the promotion of a desirable object. They must be considered either as a reason for the requirement, or as an inducement to obedience; and under either view, imply such benevolence as appears incompatible with a purpose to destroy.

* Deut. xii. 28.

† Jer. xxxii. 38, 39.

That a conviction of the peculiar benignity of God towards infants either is naturally implanted in the human breast, or grew out of some revealed communications, may be concluded from several incidents mentioned in the history of the chosen tribes. Thus, we find them, in seasons of peculiar exigency, presenting their little ones before the Lord, as pleas for the mercy which they implored. So, when the Moabites and Ammonites were ravaging the country, and threatening the national extinction of Israel, Jehoshaphat assembled his distressed subjects in the temple, to implore, by united supplications, deliverance from heaven. “And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, and their wives, and their children*.” “That it was thought of old,” says Pocock†, “a motive to compassion in God, to join in children also, in their addresses to him for mercy, appears by what is read in the Book of Judith‡.” Whatever might be the case with even the body of the people, it seems improbable that the wise and pious Jehoshaphat would, on so solemn an occasion, give his sanction to this inconvenient measure, had it been merely adapted for theatrical effect. And should it be imagined that the measure arose from a sentiment, natural enough, that God would be most influenced by what most deeply affected themselves, it must be

* 2 Chron. xx. 13.

† On Joel ii. 16.

‡ Chap. iv. 9—12.

allowed that such a sentiment with respect to the present case, was warranted and fostered by the communications of God himself.

For, apart from other considerations, it is remarkable, that the very proceeding was, on one occasion, the subject of divine appointment. "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and those that suck the breasts*." Wherefore this distinct and emphatic specification, of children, of babes at the breast? is an enquiry variously answered by commentators. Incapable, as they were, of uniting with the other classes in offering a rational service, the appointment was most probably designed, either to increase the devout emotions of parents by a view of their helpless offspring, or to intimate to them that the condescending regard of God for their little ones, would, in concurrence with his gracious acceptance of their prayers, induce him "to be jealous for his land, and pity his people." According to the former of these interpretations, the passage illustrates and confirms a remark lately made; and according to the latter, it lends a divine sanction to the sentiment entertained by the ancient church.

And long before that period, there had occurred

* Joel ii. 15, 16.

a memorable instance of Jehovah's compassionate regard for infants, even among a people who were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel," and whose crimes had extorted most solemn denunciations of vengeance. The instance in contemplation is that of the Ninevites, as recorded in the Book of Jonah. To the complaint of the prophet, that Nineveh was spared contrary to his prediction, and the gourd blasted contrary to his wishes, God condescended to reply in language at once calculated to subdue the petulance of his servant, and to illustrate his benignity towards the unsinning offspring, even of those who had greatly offended. "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night; and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that *cannot discern between their right hand and their left*; and also much cattle*?" That the periphrasis employed in this gracious declaration is descriptive of infants, appears to be not only a common opinion, but the concurrent interpretation of judicious expositors; while both the description itself, and the associating of them with unoffending animals, obviously suggests their personal innocence, as a reason for so remarkable an exercise of divine mercy.

* Jonah iv. 10, 11.

In perfect harmony with the doctrine of revelation, that illustrious instance of forbearance, even after speedy destruction had been so emphatically denounced, is commonly attributed to Jehovah's acceptance of the repentance which followed upon the preaching of Jonah. And, beyond a doubt, had the inhabitants of Nineveh remained impenitent, the threatening of the prophet would have been fulfilled. It is, however, a striking fact, that God, in explanation of his conduct, assigns another, though not incompatible reason, for enduring yet longer "the vessels of wrath"—the great number of unoffending infants, who must have perished together with their wicked parents: just as if those tender compassions which are ever readily exercised towards repenting sinners, were yet more freely exercised towards beings innocent of personal transgression. And further Jehovah intimates, that his pleasure in such beings is more becoming his character, than Jonah's in the gourd of which he so bitterly regretted the loss. Jonah had been delighted with the luxuriant and cheering shade of a plant, unproduced by his labour, and in itself so perishable. "How much more," says the Divine Apologist, "should I manifest a concern for the happiness of those little creatures, whom I have brought into being, and endowed with an imperishable nature!" The bearing of this instance upon our present investigation, lies not merely, nor

chiefly, in the fact that divine favour to the infants of Nineveh, produced a suspension of national ruin; but in the acknowledgment of paternal tenderness towards them conveyed by the announcement. Yet of those children, about sixty thousand were probably removed from life, while they knew not their right hand from their left. It seems incredible, that after these expressions of his regard, such infants, dying without having forfeited this tender concern by personal transgression, should be excluded from the presence of God for ever.

The instances of divine benignity towards infants, which thus far have been selected, are such as occurred either irrespective of the piety, or in defiance of the wickedness of their parents. And they appear sufficient to warrant our hopes, that whatever additional grounds of encouragement may be afforded in behalf of the departed infants of believing and holy persons, the riches of celestial mercy are not administered to these exclusively.

Since the Sacred Volume chiefly records the dispensations of God towards his covenant people, it might naturally be expected, that declarations of divine favour to their posterity, would be found more copious and in greater variety of form. Thus, promises of especial favour given to parents, often included the welfare of their children. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting unto everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteous-

ness unto children's children.*" To the descendants of such persons, these promises were a peculiar patrimony; and hence, in addition to general pleas for the favour of God founded on his character, the piety of progenitors was sometimes urged in their supplications. Thus the Psalmist intreats, "Give thy strength to thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.†" So also children, with their pious parents, are pronounced participants of the divine blessing, "He will bless them that fear the Lord, both small and great. The Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children. You are blessed of the Lord which made heaven and earth.‡"

There is no room for concluding, that communion of children in the privileges of their parents, was limited to the Old Testament dispensations. For besides that an abridgment of mercy, under a more gracious dispensation, is antecedently improbable, there appear unequivocal predictions of its continuance undiminished till the end of time. As a benefit of the everlasting covenant, it is foretold, that after the advent of Messiah, and the establishment of his gospel upon earth, "the seed" of his people "shall be known among the gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall

* Psalm ciii. 17.

† Ib. lxxxvi. 16.

‡ Ib. cxv. 13—15.

acknowledge that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.*” And among the glories of a period yet in advance, the object of believing anticipation, there is announced, “ they shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble ; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.†” These predictions appear indeed immediately to respect the introduction of infants to the christian church ; but thus understood, they imply a continuance of the same divine arrangement as was followed in that of the Old Testament, and also such an interest in heavenly favour, as seems incompatible with the supposition, that they are under wrath, antecedent to personal transgression.

Without venturing with some to assert, that were believers faithful to their covenant obligations, divine grace would in no instance be withheld from their offspring, there is scriptural ground to consider the children of pious persons as interested with them in spiritual blessings, until, by renouncing Christ, they forfeit this covenant privilege. Hence alone, as we are taught by the Apostle, proceeded the casting away of Israel ; and in like manner, the rejection of the descendants of gentile believers. “ For if the first-fruit be holy, the lump is also holy ; and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and

* Isa. lxi. 9.

† Ib. lxxv. 23.

thou, being a wild olive-tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree; boast not thyself against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.—Because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith.*”

The illustrations here adopted by the Apostle, shew that in this passage he employs the term “holy” according to its primitive signification, for that which is separated and set apart for God, which is accepted by him, and henceforth sustains a peculiar covenant relation to him; for thus were the first-fruits holy, according to the Levitical institution. The principle on which his whole argument depends, is, that where God accepts the parent, he accepts the children also; and he seems to have especially in view, that transaction in which Jehovah promised to be the God of Abraham, and of his seed after him. The relation thus constituted in behalf of posterity, is not indissoluble, nor are its blessings unalienable by their own voluntary act, when they arrive at moral agency; but it includes a grant of privileges, which are considered theirs till they reject them. By their unbelieving rejection of Christ, the Jews lost their birthright, and gentile believers have received it on the same terms as were established in the Abrahamic covenant.

* Rom. xi. 16—20.

Now the principal question, as affecting the subject before us, respects the nature of the blessings thus entailed. That they are not personal holiness, and an indefeasible interest in the saving benefits of the gospel, appears to be generally agreed. And it seems irrelevant to understand by them, mere external church privileges. For was it from these only, or chiefly, that the Jews were broken off because of unbelief? Do these alone come upon believing gentiles by virtue of a gracious introduction to their place? Commentators who adopt this exposition, have evidently been perplexed in their endeavours to keep up the series of the Apostle's reasoning. The most natural interpretation is on the principle, that the descendants of pious persons are acknowledged as sustaining a peculiar relation to God, by virtue of his covenant engagements, and are sharers with their parents in the blessings conveyed by those engagements, till becoming moral agents and sinners, they despise their birthright, and interrupt what may be called the natural course of sovereign mercy from generation to generation.

And there appears a remarkable uniformity in those federal transactions, by which in different ages, Jehovah established new and peculiar relations between himself and his people, or for their further encouragement, ratified the engagements already subsisting. With the parents, the children were

always expressly comprehended. Instances of this occur in the histories of Noah*, of Abraham†, of Levi‡, of Phineas§, of David¶, and of Israel at Mount Sinai||. Nor has this order of dispensation ceased under the gospel. Thus the Apostle largely insists, that the blessing of Abraham is come upon the believing gentiles through Christ**, and pronounces their children holy†† in the sense above explained. Not a single instance has occurred of departure from this arrangement. The point has been frequently, and it appears successfully maintained, by advocates for infant baptism; and it powerfully suggests the opinion above stated, that in such transactions God graciously receives the offspring with the parents into his covenant favour, the heirs of which they are considered till they become moral agents, when their state is determined by their own character, according to the terms exhibited in the gospel.

Nearly allied to this consideration is another, that indicates divine regards toward the infants

* Gen. vi. 18, and ix. 1, 8, 9.

† Ib. xvii. 7.

‡ Mal. ii. 4—6. compared with Deut. xviii. 1—5. and Numb. iii. 11—15, 39.

§ Numb. xxv. 10—13, 1 Chron. xxiii. 13.

¶ 2 Sam. vii. 11, and xxiii. 5.

|| Deut. xxix. 11. Josh. viii. 35.

** Gal. iii. 7—14.

†† 1 Cor. vii. 14.

of pious parents,—the institution of ordinances of which they especially are the subjects. Circumcision was appointed as “a seal of the righteousness of faith*,” or a pledge and assurance of God’s faithfulness to the Abrahamic promise, by believing which the patriarch was justified. As a standing ordinance among the descendants of Abraham, it was to be administered at as early an age as children are usually capable of sustaining such an operation. We also learn from indisputable authority†, that this institution was emblematical of the purifying influence of the Holy Spirit,—that influence by which the Author of grace assumes to himself the purchase of atoning blood, and prepares his redeemed for their everlasting inheritance. What then could it imply on the part of God, short of a declaration that he claimed them as his own, and was actually theirs in covenant relation, till by rebellion and a voluntary renunciation of his claim, they wrested themselves from him? Though, therefore, circumcision did not impart the certain exercise of sanctifying and saving grace to all who received the outward sign, it could scarcely import less than that God engaged to be their God and Saviour till they renounced him. Under the gospel dispensation, Christian baptism occupies the

* Rom. iv. 11.

† Deut. xxx. 6. Rom. ii. 28, 29. Col. ii. 11, 13.

same place and significancy in every material respect. Like circumcision, this institution of Jesus Christ was in the first instance applicable to parents as well as to children; but considered as a standing ordinance in the church, it ultimately contemplates the latter as its peculiar subjects. Differing from circumcision as to the external sign, baptism, under a form of administration equally impressive, is emblematical of regenerating grace, and bears every character of a federal transaction. The Divine Persons, under covenant characters, take the infants of believers into covenant protection, and, as the analogy appears to imply, acknowledge them as objects of covenant favour, till virtually renouncing the deed of their parents, they in the sense of the prophet, break the everlasting covenant.* It is, at least, difficult to conceive, that notwithstanding such gracious overtures, a very large proportion of these little dependants, even antecedent to the power of violating that covenant, should be doomed to ineffable wretchedness by eternal banishment from God.

Since, in methods so various and interesting, it has pleased our heavenly Father to indicate his kindness toward the offspring of his people, we may wonder the less, though we ought not less to admire, at finding exceedingly great and precious

* Isa. xxiv. 5.

promises given on their behalf. For instance, “ I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ; and they shall spring up as among the grass, and as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord’s ; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob ; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.*” The quotation of this gracious promise suggests a criterion for the validity of fears respecting the deceased infants of believers,—the introduction of a supplement correspondent to those fears. But it requires more than ordinary hardihood to put into language, an addition which, for this purpose, must be so discordant with the tenor of the passage, as to appear not only shocking but profane. Who can conceive, that, had the Father of mercies been pleased to reveal in this connexion the condition of such infants, his word would have proceeded thus, —“ and another”—or—“ and many others, before knowing good and evil, shall be cut off from the land of the living, and their portion be appointed with hypocrites and unbelievers ?”—Not our hearts only, but our judgments, in their coolest and most deliberate exercise, revolt at the supposition as horrid and impious. Yet why should this be the case, if we do not really think and feel, that it is in

* Isa. xliv. 3—5.

direct opposition to the tenor of revelation, and particularly so, to the numerous expressions of divine benevolence which the Sacred Volume exhibits?

From the above induction, it is clear that pious parents have grounds of hope for their children dying in infancy, altogether peculiar to themselves—such as are supplied by those gracious overtures which convey to them individually the unsearchable riches of Christ, when he is cordially received by faith. Becoming themselves confederate with God,—if the expression may be allowed,—their children are introduced with them to the same relation and privileges, and share the inheritance, as far as they are capable, till they by sin reject the God of their Fathers. Hence Christians have additional sources of encouragement, as well for their little ones as for themselves; they not only share with others the benignant influence of celestial light, but the Sun of righteousness rises upon them with beams more direct and enlivening. And it might be expected that He who chose them for his peculiar people, would make especial provision for their consolation under afflictions calculated most deeply to penetrate their heart.

But it does not follow, that because their hopes stand on a broader and firmer basis, therefore no ground whatever remains for the hopes of others. By virtue of his covenant engagements with Israel,

Jehovah introduced them to Canaan, that good land, the glory of all lands ; and for their sakes, he promised to render it, by special dispensations of Providence, peculiarly fertile and delightful ; yet this singular manifestation of his favour to them, did not imply an abstraction of his care from the human family at large, nor leave the residue of the nations destitute of fruitful showers and seasons. But without any illustration, the deduction in question is plainly inconsequential, even were there no scriptural intimations to induce a contrary opinion. Much less then can it be considered legitimate, in the face of such instances as appear in the former part of this Section, supported as they are, by the character and government of God as previously illustrated.

SECTION III.

The conduct and discourses of Jesus Christ give much encouragement to our hopes.

The favourable regards of Christ to children not mere human sensibility;—for his affections expressed the mind of God,—this position vindicated;—and he assigned reasons for them which suggest a higher source.—Instances of these regards—he accepted and vindicated their praise;—held them up as examples;—enjoined kindness to them for his sake;—most probably referred to them Matt. xviii. 10—14;—blessed them and pronounced them members of his kingdom. Objection answered.

Under a former Section, it was observed in general, that the character of our Lord Jesus Christ is a pre-eminent illustration of the moral perfections of Deity. This fact, which has been often illustrated, and is commonly allowed, has important bearings on the present subject, and is calculated to add peculiar weight to those instances of the Saviour's conduct and discourses, which are now to come under consideration.

This position is altogether compatible with another equally prominent in the Sacred Volume, that Jesus Christ is a perfect exemplar of the excellencies of human nature; for conformity to God is the perfection of man. While invested with a

mortal body, even a perfect human being must, indeed, be the subject of emotions and passions, which cannot be attributed to a pure and infinitely perfect spirit. But those emotions arise from a principle correspondent to the operations of eternal mind. The affections of Jesus Christ are not therefore to be contemplated, as merely exhibiting the dispositions of his human nature, but as disclosing the estimates and regards of uncreated and impassible excellence. In his benignity and compassion, as well as in his power and majesty, he appeared on earth, "the image of the invisible God." Under this combined view, he had been predicted many ages before his advent: "The Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom.*" In both his greatness and his goodness, therefore, he was equally "God manifest in the flesh."

Attention to this consideration is important to the illustration of many subjects, and as just observed, particularly so on the present, because the peculiar tenderness and complacency which our Lord indulged towards little children is delightfully manifest in the evangelical histories. We are apt,

* Isa. xl. 10, 11.

however, to slide insensibly into a notion, that in these expressions of affection there is discernible nothing more than the amiable features of his human character, and therefore that, considered as divine, they afford no insight into his intentions respecting them. The principle just adverted to, yields, it is conceived, a deduction both more congenial to the tenor of revelation, and more cheering to the anxious heart.

But the case of the young ruler mentioned by the Evangelists*, may probably cause the principle just laid down, to appear as at least doubtful. With very defective views of the law and of the character of Jesus Christ, he yet seems to have entertained very high respect for him. Contrary to the disposition which generally prevailed, especially among persons of his own rank, he was sincere and earnest in his desires after a better world, and anxiously sought for instructions how the blessing might be obtained. Under these impressions, he applied to Jesus, and "Jesus looking steadfastly on him, loved him." That is, "he felt the emotions of complacency mingled with tender compassion, in regard to so young a person, who had maintained so honourable a character, in such an elevated station of life, and was under such concern about another world; yet at the same time, amidst all these hopeful circum-

* Mark x. 17—31.

stances, was governed still by a secret fondness for the possessions he enjoyed in this; and as our Lord thought fit to manifest this fondness to himself and others, when he had heard these things which have been mentioned above, he was pleased to call him forth to a peculiar trial*." This test the young ruler could not at present endure, and went away sorrowful.

Hence it may be enquired, how can the love of Jesus be considered an indication of divine favour, when it fixed on a person who with all his solicitude for eternal life, loved the present world more, or at the best, did not immediately resolve to resign all his possessions for its sake? Were this question unanswerable, there would still be reason for hesitating before a concession were made, which implies so great imperfection in the moral character of Jesus, as that he fixed his affection on a son of perdition. But it may be replied, that what Jesus loved in him evidently was, what strictly accorded with the mind of God, agreeable to the principle contended for. Nor is that principle opposed, were the person himself, rather than the dispositions he manifested, the object of such kind complacency; for this amiable young man's case is not to be looked upon as desperate. The test applied to him was such, as perhaps would have foiled many during the earlier

* Doddridge, on the place.

stages of the divine life ; nor to him could it so clearly appear indispensable as immediately to demand his acquiescence. Though at present holy principles within him were too weak to endure this severe trial, he who now departed sorrowing might hereafter return triumphant over an ensnaring world : Nicodemus, who was afterwards so distinguished a disciple, appears to quite as little advantage in his first interview with the Saviour ; and the tendency of our Lord's remarks on the case is general, rather admonishing his disciples of an obstacle to piety, which we know divine grace has often ultimately overcome, than censuring the conduct of the youth, or denouncing him as notwithstanding all his profession a stranger to its influence.

This interesting case has perhaps carried us too far from the point. Let us then return.

On another ground, we may argue that the peculiar regards of Jesus Christ to little children, are not to be accounted mere indications of the amiable sensibilities of his human nature.—The expressions of those regards are accompanied by such remarks concerning children, and such references to their characteristic traits, as manifest his affection for them to be not less rational, or rather divine, than it was amiable and endearing.

Thus, not content with acquiescing in their Hosannas, or expressing simply his pleasure in these, he

vindicated those who offered them, by appealing to authority confessedly divine, “Have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise*?” As if he had said, “This event is a most signal illustration of those words; and it is by a secret influence of God on the mind of these little ones, that they are led to upbraid your silence and insensibility by so remarkable and so suitable an exclamation†.” Even supposing the terms “babes and sucklings” were employed by the Psalmist in a figurative sense, the possible truth of the literal sense must be implied. Our Lord, however, must have understood them literally; for not without disparagement can we conceive him to have adopted a fallacious mode of reasoning, for the mere purpose of confounding his enemies. Now, the passage appealed to derives all its significancy and force from an assumption, that the hearts of infants can be so disposed as eminently to subserve the divine glory. And it plainly implies, that however great the honour which God derives from the most magnificent parts of material creation, he receives yet greater from the operations of holy influence on babes and sucklings. Hence then it appears, that our Lord received with approbation the plaudits of children, because he recognized in them a capacity for gracious influence disposing them to glorify God,

* Matt. xxi. 16. Psalm viii. 2. † Doddridge.

and because he considered the operations of that influence as among the fullest and most illustrious displays of divine power and grace. The conclusion, therefore, is clearly warrantable, that qualifying them to appear for ever “to the praise of the glory of his grace,” is a process eminently subservient to the illustration of his excellencies.

In repeated instances did our Lord hold up little children as examples to his disciples, and appears to have found no clearer illustration than in them, of the disposition indispensable to a participation of his blessings. “And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven*.” In the account of this incident, as given by another evangelist, it appears that the child employed on that occasion was very young, such as the divine Teacher took into his arms, and thus presented to his audience. It is also worthy of remark, that this was done not in illustration of what every Christian ought to be, but of what every individual must become in order to his becoming a Christian. This conduct and declaration of Jesus Christ certainly do not imply

* Matt. xii. 2—4.

what some have inferred, that infants are not the subjects of a depraved nature ; for such a deduction would amount to maintaining, that no one can be a disciple of Christ till restored from that depravity which only Christ can remedy; or in other words, that sinners must be healed of this moral malady in order to their being healed. The precise point in our Lord's contemplation seems to be, that, not by what they acquire by their own investigations in the manner of men, but by what they receive with implicit submission in the manner of children, do individuals become the subjects of his spiritual kingdom. Hence, therefore, a disposition to imbibe his communications with simplicity and entire dependence is indispensable to participating saving benefits. Thus understood, the Saviour recognizes in little ones a capacity, a suitable state of mind, for partaking of these advantages. Now, it seems incongruous, that in the very view under which they are patterns to all who seek for salvation by Christ, they themselves should by necessity of nature be excluded from his salvation. And yet more so, that He who delights to impart the blessings of his grace, should acknowledge in them a state of mind exemplarily apt for receiving that grace, and yet leave them to perish, without one expression of regret, and that under the very character in which he contemplated them. Would he take pleasure in illustrating an indispensable qualification for discipleship, by

the disposition of beings who might the next moment be in perdition?

This presumption is however much strengthened, and the affection of the blessed Jesus much more clearly manifested, by those passages in which he enjoins on his disciples especial regard to these little ones for his sake. “And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them; and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whoso shall receive me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent me*.” There can be no room to doubt that this virtual command respected infants in general; for our Lord’s manner of expressing himself appears selected on purpose to guard against the supposition, that his intentions were limited to the little one whom he then presented: he says not, “whosoever shall receive this child;” but as on some other occasions, uses rather a term comprehensive of all similar objects, “one of such children.” And though the gracious recompense is promised, not to the mere fact of treating infants with tenderness and affection, but to regard towards himself as thus evinced and illustrated; yet this mode of expressing such regard cannot be a mere arbitrary test of deference and affection, consistent with perfect indifference towards the objects

* Mark ix. 36, 37.

on whom it was to be immediately exercised, because it substantially requires the employment of every means to promote their welfare. The very spirit of the implied injunction, is, Be kind to them, as an expression of your love for me. It breathes the disposition of a father, who leaving for a time the objects of his paternal solicitude, commends them to the attentions of friendship, with an assurance, that he should consider every instance of kindness shewn to them, as shewn to himself. And what is yet more, our Lord here clearly intimates the accordance of his human affection with the mind of God: "Whoso shall" thus "receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me."

Thus does the condescending Saviour identify himself with infants. Thus does he appeal in their behalf to the most pure and spiritual principles of Christian obedience, and endeavour by the most attractive considerations to secure for little children a place in the heart of those by whose instrumentality his cause should be prosecuted in the world. And it is a remarkable fact, that those considerations are precisely the same, by which he emboldened them to labour and suffer in his cause, and commended them in discharging their sacred functions, to the cordial attentions of mankind. "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.*"

* Matt. x. 40.

On another discourse of our Lord, we might reason with greater confidence, and in fact with full conviction on the argument before us, were there not usually considered an ambiguity in the terms employed to designate its subjects. The passage referred to appears in the evangelist Matthew.* On the interpretation of the terms “little ones,” which direct the application of the whole, commentators differ; and probably from the fact of some popular and justly esteemed writers having adopted a figurative explication of those words, the current of public opinion seems to have run in that direction. By what reasons these interpreters have been induced to reject the common application of this phrase, and to understand it here of meek and lowly Christians, it does not appear; except that by appealing in proof to the sixth verse, some discover that they consider this discourse as a continuation, and conclude, none but those who with the spirit of children believe in Christ can be intended†. Others however of the best practical expositors, consider infants as at least included among the “little ones” referred to by our Lord‡, while others expound the passage of them alone§. Eminent fathers, both in the eastern and western churches,

* Chap. xviii. 10—14.

† Poli Synopsis in loc.

‡ Henry. Doddridge.

§ Lightfoot, Hor. Heb. Wolfii. Curæ Phil.

sanction the literal and ordinary acceptation of the terms, and the consequent application of the passage to infants. Hence one of the most celebrated and ancient writers of the eastern church institutes an enquiry, whether those little ones are committed to the guardianship of angels from their birth, or only from their baptism, evidently inclining to the latter opinion, in which many ancient writers appear to agree with him.* And another, almost of equal learning and authority in the western church, pronounces it a great honour to human souls, that every one from the birth should be placed under angelic tutelage.† Whatever unwarrantable opinion respecting guardian angels, the fathers may have endeavoured to support by this passage, their general application of it to infants, accords with the soundest principles of interpretation. The terms in question are of frequent recurrence in the Sacred Volume, and with the exception of two or three instances of doubtful import, are uniformly indicative of little children; nor will the laws of sound interpretation warrant the adoption of a metaphorical sense, unless some explanatory clause, or the exigencies of the case, require that substitution.

Of the little ones here contemplated, and against

* Origen, Tractat. 5. in Matt.—Suicer, Vol. I. p. 43.

† Jerome in loc. Vide etiam Spenceri Annot. in Origen adversus Cels. p. 83.

the contemptuous treatment of whom our Lord is guarding his disciples, several things are declared as arguments to enforce the admonition.

FIRST. They are objects of angelic care. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven:" that is, they are interested in that peculiar dispensation and arrangement of Providence, by which especial provision is made for the welfare of persons peculiarly dear to God;—the angels are theirs, who partaking the highest felicity and glory of creatures, do not disdain to minister to them.* Until, therefore, they forfeit by sin their present character, it seems that they are interested in that system of paternal administration, which is exercised in the course of divine Providence towards believers in Christ.

SECONDLY. They are comprehended in the general design of the Saviour's advent. "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine

* Comp. Heb. i. 14.

which went not astray !” Thus, our Lord represents these little ones as, without his interference, inevitably alienated from God and happiness, and suggests, that though speaking generally they are not yet in fact restored, still they are comprehended in his saving designs, and that to gather them home to security and felicity, will be the delight of his heart. Thus then, it would seem, little ones are objects of redeeming goodness, regarded in the design of redemption considered as a provision for the salvation of men, which, as we shall hereafter have occasion to remark, amply compensates for the evils incurred by the original apostacy.

THIRDLY. The divine pleasure concerns itself in their salvation. “ Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.” This argument may import, that if any of these little ones perish, their destruction will not proceed from any sovereign will of God, but from their own criminality ; according to many similar expressions with respect to mankind in general ;* and thus understood, it vouches for their safety in case of death antecedent to personal transgression. Or it refers to the preceptive will of God, and urges, on the ground of obedience to him, the use of all means conducive to their salvation in case life be continued to them ; and

* Ezek. xviii. 23, 32. 2 Pet. iii. 9.

thus, in accordance with the preceding instance, commends them to the especial care and attention of the apostles, and of succeeding ministers or christians in general.

It will probably be conceded by most readers, that the above view of this interesting passage is in itself highly probable, and strictly analogous to the general tenor of revealed truth. Nothing but a suspicion, arising perhaps from long established associations, that the leading terms might *possibly* be only a characteristic appellation of believing disciples, remains to keep the judgment in suspense, and the heart in inquietude; and thus to render yet farther investigation desirable.

There is however a very important and encouraging incident recorded by three of the Evangelists, of which the application is unquestionable.* A precise view of this interesting event will perhaps be obtained, by introducing the circumstances, as arranged in the Harmony of Dr. Doddridge. "And they brought infants and young children unto him, that he should touch them or put his hands upon them, and pray: and when his disciples saw it, they rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is

* Matt. xix. 13—15. Mark x. 13—16. Luke xviii. 15—17.

the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein: and he called them unto him, took them up in his arms, and put his hands upon them and blessed them; and departed thence."

That this condescending attention of Jesus Christ was bestowed on infants literally understood, is indisputable; for both the terms by which its objects are designated, and the circumstance so specifically noticed, that they were brought in the arms of others, and received into those of the Saviour, preclude all danger of misapprehension. Of his affection to these, there appear several remarkable indications. It is rarely indeed that we discover traces of the Saviour's displeasure against persons of honest intentions, yet in the present instance, we are informed that he was even greatly displeased, and that with his most beloved and devoted disciples, for interposing to prevent the access of these little ones to him. It is reasonable to suppose, that knowing their divine Master was fully occupied in instructing persons of mature years, they considered the introduction of these children to him as an unseasonable intrusion. But it appears that so far from coinciding in sentiment with them, our Lord was indignant that those who knew him so well, should indulge a supposition, that he ever held the office of blessing little children unseasonable

and unwelcome. This fact not only develops much of our Lord's peculiar affection for such, but implies that he had given sufficient opportunities to his immediate attendants of knowing it; for one so candid and gracious as the blessed Jesus, would not have shewn himself much displeased, unless there had been criminality. And in what respect could they thus be blameworthy, unless in neglecting the instructions on this subject which he had previously given? If the charge against despising little ones, had been recently delivered, and were intended in the sense above explained, a sufficient cause of his displeasure is apparent. This, or something equivalent, must be supposed, to preserve the harmony and propriety of our Lord's conduct on the present occasion.

But the regards of Jesus Christ not only exceeded the imagination of his disciples; it even surpassed the expectations and requests of those who commended these little ones to his attention. They begged "that he would lay his hands on them and pray;" he received them into his arms, and folded them on his bosom. Surely, those infants had a nearer interest in the Saviour, than could be supplied by the sensibilities of an affectionate heart!

This sentiment, so powerfully suggested by his conduct, is confirmed by his language. He blessed them and said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the king-

dom of God." Considered as a reproof to his disciples, this declaration amounts to saying, "You ought not to wonder at the displeasure which I have shown; for you have had opportunities of knowing, and therefore should, on this occasion, have considered, that I reckon these as sustaining the same spiritual relation to me as yourselves, as belonging also to the kingdom of God." Considered as a reason of his peculiar affection to little children, the declaration shews, that such affection arose not from mere human sensibilities, but from important and spiritual considerations. And considered as the announcement of a fact, the declaration distinctly avows, that infants, as such, possess an interest and communion with believers, in that state which the Sacred Writers describe as the kingdom of God.

When the advocates of pædo-baptism so clearly and fully maintain, as they do, that this passage proves the right of infants to introduction into the visible church, they proceed on the assumption, that infants are, while they remain such, in fact, members of the spiritual church; for Jesus Christ would not, most assuredly, acknowledge as members of his church, in any shape, those who do not spiritually, that is really, belong to him. Men, guided by moral indications, may be deceived; and hence, the visible church does not in all respects coincide with the spiritual church: hypocrites and

formalists in religion may occupy a place in the one, who have no part in the privileges of the other; but in the estimate of Christ, both are co-extensive; he never would receive and pronounce a hypocrite or a formalist to be a member of the kingdom of God, but he has assigned this privilege to infants as such. So far as the present subject is concerned, it is immaterial whether this privilege be understood immediately of communion with saints on earth, or with the blessed in heaven; for none will be admitted into final glory, who are not here partakers of spiritual blessings, and all whom Christ recognizes as belonging to his kingdom here, are heirs of his kingdom hereafter. But whatever differences of opinion respecting the relation of infants to the church on earth, divide the Christian world, it is well known that wise and spiritual divines of all parties, hold themselves warranted by our Lord's declaration, to consider them, as such, inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

The attempts which have been sometimes made to shew that Jesus Christ only meant, that the kingdom of God consisted "of such" persons as are like children in disposition, have been abundantly proved to be futile, and perhaps indicate too clearly the perverting influence of determined adherence to system. It would be difficult to conceive how the obvious import could be more clearly signified; and had our Lord used the expression,

“ of these is the kingdom of God,” he would have given countenance to an opinion, that the privilege in question was limited to the children present. His language as it stands, shews that he considered those little ones as members of his spiritual family, not in virtue of a personal prerogative, but as they were placed under circumstances of peculiar mercy, which they shared in common with other infants.

According to the decision of Jesus Christ himself, therefore, little children, as such, belong to the kingdom of heaven ; and this encouraging declaration is neither restricted to those who were then introduced to his attention, nor so far as appears, to any number discriminated from the infant race of mankind in general. Had the whole world of little ones been in like manner brought to him, our judgment and our heart must equally suggest, that he would have given them all the same welcome, bestowed on them the same benediction, and accounted for his conduct by the same declaration.

But it may be suggested, that such conclusion implies the mutability of divine love, as it supposes, that those who were objects of it during infancy, may afterwards be alienated from Christ, and perish for ever. This, however, forms no valid objection ; for the love of God is not absolutely immutable with respect to its objects. The same reasoning would apply with equal cogency to the case of Adam ; for he while innocent, was an object of divine complacency, but by sin lost this

high privilege. It is justly maintained, that he was under a dispensation different from that which his posterity believing in Christ enjoy; and that, therefore, there can be no reasoning from one case to the other. With equal propriety it may be maintained, that there can be no reasoning from the case of adult believers to that of infants, because the cases are different. God has voluntarily engaged to carry on the good work begun in believers till the day of Christ, and therefore, his love to them is unchangable; he has made no such engagement respecting infants, and there appears nothing more inconsistent with his character in suffering them to lose their innocence, and consequently their interest in his especial favour, than occurs in the case of our first progenitor, or in that of fallen angels. The condition of infants through the mediation of Christ, appears to be more analogous to that of Adam, personally considered, than to that of believers under the operation of a new and divine nature, secured to them by infallible promises.

Upon the whole, no principle seems to be discoverable, on which the peculiar affection of Jesus Christ towards infants, arising from such considerations as he repeatedly and distinctly avowed, can be reconciled with any opinion inconsistent with the one here advocated,—that children before personal transgression are interested in the salvation of Christ; and dying in that condition, are consequently, in the fullest sense, subjects of the kingdom of heaven.

SECTION IV.

*The plan of Redemption and Salvation by Jesus Christ .
affords strong grounds of hope.*

- To this, if saved, infants must be indebted.—That redemption comprehends infants argued—from the *preceding facts*;—no other medium of divine favour—yet this shewn to them;—though by nature under wrath—they are beloved by God;—the declarations of Christ suggest this;—objects not merely of compassion but complacency;—this consistent with subsequent fall into sin, &c.
- From *general views given of redemption*;—a sovereign provision for exercising mercy;—for sinners, much more infants;—relative view of the ends to be accomplished leads to the same conclusion;—this consistent with the great number of those that perish.
- From the *correspondence between the fall and restoration*;—in general, both by sovereign constitutions—the latter remedial of the former;—in particular, as shewn Rom. v. 12—19—design of the Apostle illustrated;—he certainly contemplated the case of infants;—the latter provision co-extensive with the former as to its objects;—and surpassing in influence;—infants may “receive the abundance of grace.” The Apostle’s summary of the fact.
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AFTER all that has appeared, it must be considered of prime importance to ascertain, whether infants, as such, are comprehended in the method of redemption and salvation, as revealed in the gospel. There is confessedly, no other way of salvation for either adults or infants. A deceased child, received into glory, is as truly indebted to sovereign grace and redeeming love, as the most

awful transgressor ever wrested from the jaws of destruction. For though, being innocent of personal crimes, it seems that infants are not subjected by the constitution through which they fell, to eternal torments; yet neither are they entitled to those manifestations of divine favour which constitute the felicities of heaven, nor can they receive them, but through his mediation, who “suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.”

The facts and reasonings which have already occurred, furnish various remarks, that give countenance and support to the position now under consideration. To suggest a few of these may here be sufficient.

We are aware of no medium through which the benevolence of a holy and righteous God can, honourably to himself, be exercised towards the fallen race of Adam, excepting him who is emphatically the “one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.” Hence we contend for the necessity of a mediatorial satisfaction, because it appears unworthy of God, as holy in his character, and righteous in his government, to hold immediately favourable intercourse with depraved creatures; and because the exercise of mercy ought so to illustrate his just abhorrence of sin, as to leave the great principles of moral government no less firm and conspicuous, than if sin had never intervened. And this reasoning is not less convincing

to a correct judgment, than it is obviously founded on scriptural representations. But we have seen, that both the declarations and conduct of God discover, in a peculiar manner, his benevolent care for the infant offspring of fallen man. And since these expressions of divine regard contemplate them as infants, uncharged with personal sin, we have reason to conclude that as such they are comprehended in that provision by which he is "in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself."

So also under another view, we know that infants are fallen creatures; and sharing to a certain extent the natural consequence of sin, they are "by nature the children of wrath even as others.*" Yet in very many instances, as we have seen, the blessed God speaks of them with the tenderness of paternal affection; and Jesus Christ, the fairest image of infinite moral perfection, manifested to none more benignity and love than he did to them. Now on what principle can we reconcile these apparent inconsistencies, unless on the ground that, being comprehended as infants in the gracious plan of redemption, they were saved from the wrath to which they are by nature subject?

And to pass by other reasons of this his peculiar regard, assigned by our Lord, his declaration lately considered, that "of such is the kingdom of God,"

* Eph. ii. 3.

appears like a distinct avowal that his redemption comprehends infants. For redemption is but the accomplishment of a divine design, the nature and extent of which are manifested by the issue; if therefore they not only may in advancing life become, but in infancy actually are, members of the kingdom of God, they must have been contemplated as such in the design.

It is allowed that the Mediator himself, and God in him, have on various occasions manifested compassion for abandoned sinners, who have nevertheless been left ultimately to perish. But the language employed on such occasions implies a sentiment, as different from the divine regards toward infants, as compassion is from complacency. Of this, any one may be sensible who compares the exquisite and tender lamentation of Christ over Jerusalem*, with the passages illustrated in the preceding section. A pathetic admonition is not to be confounded with a benediction; nor a warning of danger wilfully incurred, with an assurance that of such is the kingdom of heaven. He may express pity, and admonish of danger, who does not purpose to save; but it appears incredible, that he who in such interesting variety of form discovers love and complacency, should purpose to resign to perdition.

* Matt. xxiii. 37—39.

And though it may be also conceded, that children whose lives are spared to moral agency, become actually vicious, and thus objects of divine displeasure, the fact does not evince that while personally innocent they were not objects of divine complacency, but only as was lately observed, that by transgression they are rendered otherwise.

Revelation exhibits the plan of redemption, as a grand expedient for exercising sovereign benevolence towards sinful men, in harmony with the rectitude and honour of supreme moral government. Nothing but sin rendered such a measure necessary. Had not this direful intruder thrust itself on the universe, all-sufficient goodness would have flowed uninterrupted and unrestrained in all directions; like the unbroken and perennial radiance of an unclouded sun diffusing itself over dependant worlds. Now, infants have not themselves interposed any obstruction to this natural course of unbounded goodness; all their incapacity to receive and improve to the utmost of their natural powers, the advantages of this celestial influx, is attributable merely to a sovereign arrangement. From this consideration alone, and without again adverting to the principle, that the operations of sovereignty are essentially benevolent, it is reasonable to infer, that redemption, an illustrious provision for the consistent exercise of benevolence, would comprehend those who need it, not because of their personal

crimes, but because the Father of mercies was pleased, for wise though inscrutable reasons, to subject them to the influence of that sovereign arrangement.

The production of happiness to fallen creatures, however, is but the immediate and subordinate object to be attained by the work of redemption; the chief and ultimate is the glory of God, or such display of his character as will most exalt him in the estimation of intelligent beings. With respect to individuals, it is confessed, that the subordinate and the chief end do not always coincide; for sinners, finally impenitent, will afford occasions of illustrating the divine excellencies in their everlasting torments. Considered in relation to the extent of redemption, it appears that one of these ends must suggest to us the amplitude, and the other, the limitation; that is, either the blessings of redemption extend to fallen men as far as is consistent with the divine glory, or on the other hand, no farther than is necessary to the divine glory. The latter part of the alternative, or the supposition that God designs to save no greater number of mankind than is requisite for the honour of his grace, by no means harmonizes with scriptural views of his character, nor with the uniform announcements of his purpose. To the former conclusion we are unavoidably led, on reading, that he delighteth in mercy; that the mediatorial consti-

tution is the voluntary production of his sovereign grace; that the bestowment of his only-begotten Son is the strongest expression of his love; and that he willeth not the death of any sinner.

Hence then, we may conclude, that the fruits of divine mercy are imparted wherever the interests of divine honour do not require exception. Now, it seems an impossible supposition that the illustration of any divine perfection should require any children dying without personal crime to be excluded from eternal happiness; or that in any respect God would be more glorified, that is, the excellency of his nature be rendered more apparent and adorable, in the view of right reason, by their destruction than by their salvation. The contrary supposition finds an easy admission to our minds, and falls harmoniously into the system of our conceptions, as produced by the tenor of revelation.

Nor is there ground for an objection, that such reasoning must be fallacious, because it proves too much since it implies that the designs of sovereign grace ought to comprehend the happiness of all the human race. For such procedure would be eminently dishonourable to God. Redemption, thus universal, would amount to a bill of indemnity to all sinners, a licence to men to transgress under an assurance of impunity, while the holiness and justice of God would be for ever deprived of practical illustration.

And if it be enquired, why this gracious purpose of God to save does not manifestly include a much larger number of persons who arrive at maturity, the reply is obvious. There certainly lies in the eternal mind, a reason for every instance in which a sinner is left to the administrations of punitive justice. "The only wise God" must ever act upon sufficient reasons; for this is essential to wisdom. The same remark equally applies to the discrimination with which divine grace is exercised. Though there can be no meritorious cause on the part of any sinner, why he should be chosen to salvation; yet we must either conceive that there are reasons for this choice in the divine mind, or confound the sovereignty of God with mere caprice. It is indeed, easy to discern the wisdom of such discrimination, as exercised towards actual sinners; for thus it becomes manifest from fact, that salvation is wholly of grace, and its great Author receives the glory; while no one who may be left to the ordinary course of moral government, can have cause to complain, because he will receive an equitable doom. But no such reason occurs to shew the wisdom, and consequent propriety, of exercising a like discrimination among beings, who are removed by Providence from the present state before their moral probation has commenced.

An attentive reader of the Sacred Volume, cannot have overlooked the correspondence so frequently

adverted to, as subsisting between the two divine constitutions, by which mankind on the one hand fell in Adam, and on the other, are restored in Christ. That these are not in all respects parallel is readily conceded; and among the discrepancies, none is more clear than the difference of their extent on the happiness of mankind individually considered; for through the transgression of Adam all men became sinners, but a part of mankind only are eventually restored and saved by the righteousness of Christ. Yet even on a general consideration of these extraordinary mediums of divine intercourse with man, there arise certain points of comparison, favourable to our hopes for departed infants.

Neither of these arrangements grew, like the moral law, out of the natural order of things, or was essential to a perfect system of moral government: they were superinduced by the sovereign good pleasure of God, on that state which arose by virtue of creation. How long after the creation we are not informed, Jehovah was thus pleased to make to his favoured creature man, a conditional grant of privileges to which no creature could be entitled; and when by the forfeiture of that grant, the human race were involved in sin and misery, instead of dealing with them according to strict equity, he was pleased to reveal a further extraordinary provision for restoring them to forfeited

blessings, through “the second Adam, the Lord from heaven.”

This is not the place to attempt an illustration of Jehovah’s conduct toward our first parents, nor to shew, that in all probability, the covenant transaction with Adam, was benevolent in its nature and tendency. It may be sufficient to observe, that as the human race fell by virtue of a sovereign dispensation, their restoration by a provision of the same kind, evidently appears a beautiful and harmonious mode of procedure. Besides, if sin had entered the world and overspread mankind, by a direct and immediate infringement of the law of creation, or of those obligations which result from the natural relations subsisting between God and man, the wisdom and propriety of an interference with the regular course of equity, by a procedure resulting from sovereign benevolence, would, certainly, have been less apparent and impressive. But since it was by violating a sovereign appointment, that Adam fell, and all his race became involved in the consequences of his crime, the same sovereignty could with glorious propriety make provision for the restoration of all,—at least of all who should not on personal grounds render themselves amenable to justice, and of all who should meet the claims of justice by that special plea with which it would supply them.

And is it conceivable that the exercise of this

adorable prerogative, which cannot injure, which never operates but to bless,—is it conceivable, that while there intervene no claims of justice, this adorable prerogative should not provide a full compensation for consequences which result from its own arrangements?—and especially when it appears highly probable, that those previous arrangements were adopted, to evince the propriety and beauty of its interference for man's deliverance? And if it provide for the salvation of multitudes who have given full and awful sanction to their first parents' crime, will it make no provision for those who have never been even capable of crime?

While these general views afford a strong presumption, that human beings dying in infancy are comprehended in the great plan of redemption and salvation by Jesus Christ, we find the position confirmed by some remarkable intimations of Sacred Writ. The analogy of the two systems just considered, in particular, is professedly established and illustrated by the apostle Paul. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (for until the law, sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of

him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence, death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ :) Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous*."

This specific illustration of the subject before us, is given at large, because whatever difficulties occur in certain parts, and whatever differences of interpretation they may admit, it is conceived that the impression produced by the passage as a whole, is decisively in favour of the reasoning employed above. That impression, it is hoped, will not be weakened by a somewhat particular view of the Apostle's design.

* Rom. v. 12—19.

The former parts of this important epistle, are devoted to a copious and very affecting exhibition of the universal depravity of mankind, and of the condemnation under which all men consequently lie, according to the tenor of the law, or standing and ordinary rule of supreme moral government. Those awful scenes are succeeded by glowing and sublime developments of that illustrious provision, which divine grace has made in the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which a deliverance may be effected from deserved condemnation, and an introduction be obtained to the favour and enjoyment of God ; so that in addition to other privileges stated by the Apostle in the former part of the chapter, men who are in themselves sinners, meriting the awful denunciations of eternal wrath, may “rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *they* have now received the atonement.” Having stated the facts, it remained for the inspired Penman to disclose the sources whence they spring. This he does in the paragraph above quoted, by a comparative view of the two grand constitutions of sovereign benevolence, according to which all divine proceedings with men have been conducted, from the days of Paradise downward. Without attempting a full and minute exposition of this signal passage, which has been justly reckoned by divines of different persuasions to present difficulties of no ordinary magnitude, a view of its contents may be

obtained, perhaps clear enough to shew, that it has an important and encouraging aspect on the present subject.

The Apostle in the first place states in general* that there is a harmonious correspondence between that sovereign appointment, according to which “sin entered into the world and death by sin,” and that, according to which righteousness was introduced and life by righteousness. As has been generally observed by commentators†, the latter part of the comparison is here suppressed, because it could be so easily supplied from the preceding verse, and because it would unavoidably be exhibited in the subsequent illustration.

A fact very important to our present purpose, is however incidentally introduced, before the professed illustration of the subject commences. Whatever might be the particular design of this parenthesis‡, it shows clearly enough that in his discourse, the Apostle contemplated the condition of infants. They are not indeed expressly mentioned as such; and therefore some learned and ingenious writers, who oppose the doctrine of original sin, have looked around them for some other objects, to whom they could with sufficient plausibility apply the description, “them that had not sinned after

* Ver. 12. † Macknight and Guyse, on the place.

‡ Ver. 13, 14.

the similitude of Adam's transgression." It may be enough here to remark, that they all appear to have failed ; and to assign a probable reason why infants were thus described, rather than expressly mentioned.

" If the Apostle in this place meant those who never sinned by their personal act, it is not strange that he should express this by their *not sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression*. We read of two ways of men being like Adam, or in which a similitude to him is ascribed to men : One is, being begotten or born in his image or likeness* ; Another is, transgressing God's covenant or law, like him†. "*They, like Adam‡, have transgressed the covenant*. Infants have the former similitude, but not the latter. And it was very natural, when the Apostle would infer that infants become sinners by that one act and offence of Adam, to observe, that they had not renewed the act of sin themselves, by any second instance of a like sort. And such might be the state of language among Jews and Christians at that day, that the Apostle might have no phrase more aptly to express this meaning. The manner in which the epithets *personal* and *actual* are used and applied now in this case, is probably of later date, and more modern use§."

* Gen. v. 3. † Hos. vi. 7. ‡ So, in the *Heb.* and *Vulg. Lat.*

§ Edwards, Original Sin, Part II. chap. iv. sect. 2.

It is further remarkable, that in this immediate connection, while particularly adverting to the privation which infants sustain by their relation to Adam, the apostle should subjoin the remarkable terms, "Who is the figure of him that was to come." The ordinary process of mental operations certainly gives countenance to a supposition, that the thought immediately present to his mind, was, the especial respect of that illustrious system of compensation which he was explaining, to those who died without personal transgression. At the very least, this important parenthesis shews, that even in the announcement of his subject, those little sufferers were not forgotten, and were not excluded from interest in the facts which he was about to illustrate.

On proceeding to his proposed illustration, the Apostle notices three points of comparison between those divine arrangements of which he is treating; and these points of comparison are severally accompanied with a point of contrast, calculated to display the surpassing beneficial influence of the latter.

The first point of comparison establishes a parallel with respect to the subjects comprehended in these divine constitutions, and marks a contrast between their influence on the condition of those subjects*. Both of these illustrious plans, the

* Ver. 15.

Apostle informs us, had respect to “the many”—an expression which, implying the multitude, men in general, was not uncommon among both Greeks and Hebrews,—and he appears studiously to employ the same terms on both sides of the comparison, as strictly antithetical. By the former of these constitutions, “the many,” in consequence of the transgression of Adam, became subject to death, or separation from the enjoyment of God; by the latter, a provision was made for their restoration to life, or introduction to that high privilege of which they had been deprived. It is observable, the Apostle does not say, *they lived*, which the antithesis might naturally suggest, had it been fact; but uses an expression which implies that an abundant provision was made for this purpose: “the grace of God, and the gift by grace, hath abounded,” or made abundant provision “for the many.”

There must, therefore, be a sense in which, as to their subjects, both these constitutions are co-extensive. That they are not so in the issue is abundantly clear; for to suppose that all who fell in Adam, are justified and eventually saved in Christ, is in opposition to the whole tenor of the gospel revelation. If they be not thus co-extensive in the issue, neither can they be in the special—or as it has been called the decretive—design of God with respect to the ultimate happiness of individuals; for his counsel shall stand. This point may indeed be explained

on the principle of many excellent divines, who consider the atonement of Christ as “a general remedy, admitting, according to the divine pleasure and purpose, of a particular application*.” On this principle, it is a very improbable supposition, that about half the human race, removed by death while destitute of personal transgression, should, by necessity of nature, be excluded from all the advantages of this general remedy. In no other way could such beings be comprehended in the general design of redemption, than as it removed the penal consequences of the fall, a sentiment which has been maintained by many, and which the most natural interpretation of the apostle’s language suggests, so far at least as deceased infants are concerned. The objections from fact, commonly made to this opinion, are, it is conceived, superseded by the remarks formerly given†. If the provision of redemption be equally comprehensive with the entailment of guilt, it follows, that infants who have no personal sin to answer for, will share its rich and glorious fruits in eternity; as they are among “the many” who by the fall are cut off from the favour and enjoyment of God, so they are among “the

* Wardlaw on the Socinian Controversy, Discourse VII. See also the late Rev. Andrew Fuller’s Essays; Dr. Williams’s Modern Calvinism; Rev. W. Bennett’s Legislative Authority of Revealed Grace.

† See, especially, Part I. sec. 2. and Part II. sec. 1.

many" for whose restoration the grace hath made abundant provision. This interpretation is supported by what immediately follows.

For the next point of comparison between these two divine constitutions respects sin, the immediate moral cause of men's condemnation ; and the point of disparity respects the influence of the mediatorial plan, as superseding not merely the penal consequences of Adam's sin, but the condemnation due to his posterity for their transgressions as individuals. " And not as it was by one that sinned so is the gift : for the judgment was by one to condemnation ; but the free gift is of many offences unto justification." Judgment came upon man, and he was thus deprived of " chartered blessings," by one person sinning ; but the mediation of Jesus Christ not only supersedes that condemnation, but provides justification from the charge of many offences, or deliverance from the condemnation due to many personal crimes. " The free gift of God's grace," says Guyse, " through the obedience and righteousness of Christ, is effectual, not only for the remission of that one sin, but also of innumerable personal transgressions, whereby fallen men have still more and more revolted from God and highly offended him ; it is effectual unto their complete discharge from all their actual, as well as original guilt, and unto their entire freedom from all condemnation, and full acceptance with God, as righteous,

through faith in this great Head and Redeemer*.” Thus then, the Apostle may be considered as teaching us, that the provisions of divine grace completely shield from the penal consequences of Adam’s transgression, separately considered ; because he affirms, that they extend not to this only but much farther. And if this view of his doctrine be correct, as it seems to be, the mischiefs sustained by unsinning infants, are fully compensated by the redemption provided in Christ.

The third point of comparison respects the constituted heads of these divine arrangements ; and the point of contrast lies in the consequences of each arrangement respectively to those who are interested in them. As Adam, who transgressed, was the head of the former ; so is Jesus Christ, who provided abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, of the latter. By the former, death, comprehending all natural evil or suffering, reigned over man ; by the latter, men triumph over death, and reign in life. “ For if by one man’s offence, death reigned by one ; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.”†

Here it is that the Apostle places a limitation to the actual efficiency of the Redeemer’s interference ; for he represents that those, and those only shall

* Expositor on the place.

† Ver. 17.

reign in life, who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness. This announcement may at first sight appear to exclude infants, who cannot exercise faith in the great provision, from all saving interest in its blessings; and according to the opinion of those who represent the principle of faith, as originating in the mere employment of human powers, without immediate divine influence on the soul, or even of those who consider the actual exercise of faith as in all cases indispensable to justification, the Apostle's doctrine is fatal to our hopes for the happiness of deceased infants. Such persons however who accord in sentiment with the views formerly given*, discover here nothing unharmonious with their opinion, or subversive of their hopes. Without philological discussion, or philosophical remark, the ordinary import of receiving a favour, a gift, a prerogative, is well known to signify, being made partaker of such favour, gift or prerogative, an idea as applicable to infants as to adults. Such is the customary import of the term used by the Apostle, when it occurs in combinations similar to the place under consideration†. To receive is, therefore, to be made partakers of "the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteous-

* Part I. Sect. 4.

† *Vide* Schleusner, in AAMBANΩ, No. 2.

ness," of which none perhaps will deny that infants are capable.

Having thus illustrated his position, the Apostle in the following verses* reduces the whole to a summary, and lays down the evangelical doctrine on this great subject. As all are naturally under condemnation through the offence of Adam, so justification of life is provided for all men by the righteousness of Christ; for as through the disobedience of the former, "the many" were constituted or treated as sinners, so, the penal consequences thus entailed being superseded by the obedience of the latter, "the many" are treated as delivered from that condemnation:—God is manifested "in Christ, reconciling the world to himself," dispensing innumerable blessings of providence to all, objective means of instruction in rich abundance to multitudes, and sovereign influences to render those means certainly effectual for the salvation of his chosen people.

If this important, and confessedly difficult passage, receive any additional light from the above remarks, no apology will be thought necessary for the somewhat disproportionate length to which they have extended. And if they fairly exhibit the doctrine of the sacred Penman, it can be as little necessary to repeat, that they strongly

* 18, 19.

suggest great encouragement to our hopes for deceased infants; for it appears that their case was particularly contemplated by the Apostle,—that they are comprehended among the many for whom redemption is made by Christ,—that by him the penal consequences of the fall under which they suffer are removed,—and that they are capable of partaking the abundance of grace which he has provided. And all these conclusions harmonize with the results to which we are led by such general views of redemption as divine revelation supplies, by various important facts which it specifically records, and by the general principles of divine government which it clearly develops.

SECTION V.

Scriptural views of human Accountability and of future Judgment confirm our hopes.

Intention of appealing to this topic. That men are accountable according to advantages and dispositions to improve them ;—this reasonable ;—confirmed by the Scriptures ;—infants therefore not accountable. Various representations of the general judgment ;—none of them refer to infants ;—who are nevertheless capable of the rewards of the righteous.

IT has been formerly contended, that as infants confessedly are not moral agents, so neither can they be properly considered the subjects of moral government. By a rapid glance at the representations given in the Scriptures, of human accountability, and of the future judgment, it is chiefly intended to confirm that sentiment.

The rule of accountability, and therefore of judgment, is the moral law, or that rule of action which is immediately founded on the constituted relations of any created being, and directly subserves the ultimate purposes of his existence. The violation of this is sin, and exposes to righteous retribution ; because it not only contemns the authority of the Supreme Lawgiver, but in its tendency, defeats the very ends of existence. But sin consists very much,

if not wholly, in the disposition of the agent; and the malignity of that disposition is evidently great, not only according to the amount of actual transgression, but according to the amount of moral advantages for obedience. Not to insist on other points, it may be sufficient to advert to the last, just suggested, that there is an increase or diminution of accountability, according to the increase or diminution of advantages for obedience, in other words, for aiming at the glory of God in our personal happiness.

We perhaps have no reason from the Sacred Volume for supposing, that any persons, destitute of evangelical instruction, will be saved; “for as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law*.” But on the other hand, those persons only, or “as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.” Those, therefore, who are destitute of revelation, are not accountable for the violation of laws, known only by means of revelation. Hence, though they may perish for their offences, committed against the light and advantages they have, their condition will be more tolerable, than that of persons who perish by neglecting the overtures of the Gospel†. Those who despised Moses’ law incur a severer doom than the heathen; but “of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye,

* Rom. ii. 12.

† Matt. xi. 21—25.

shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace*.”

Thus, it appears to be not only a dictate of reason, but the testimony of revelation, that individuals are held accountable, according to their opportunities of learning and fulfilling their obligations. How then can infants be at all accountable, who have no opportunities, nor even a natural capacity, of learning what their obligations as human beings are? If therefore, they be treated as accountable, it will be an anomalous procedure in the government of God; and if they perish, must perish without trial, and because the God of all grace takes pleasure in their destruction. The only alternative of condemnation, appears to be, salvation through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Again, the Sacred Scriptures bring forward the day of final retribution, with interesting copiousness and impressive variety. Sometimes, we observe them earnestly warning sinners of its certain approach; at others, minutely describing their characters who are liable to a tremendous sentence; and at other times, graphically depicting the sublime and awful

* Heb. x. 28, 29.

proceedings of judgment. But no where do they advert, in this connection, to the case of that equal portion of the human race, who never became moral agents in a state of probation; and they uniformly maintain that those who are condemned, are condemned according to their works, receiving only an equitable doom, merited by their own crimes. Such is the doctrine of revelation, both in the Old and the New Testaments*. On this ground, admonitions are addressed to perhaps all conceivable varieties of character, who are liable to condemnation: to abusers of divine mercy†; to profane persons‡; to those who neglect Christ, and the offices of holiness§, and to formal or hypocritical professors of religion||. These, and others, will suffer the wrath which “is revealed from heaven, against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;” but no where are individuals admonished, or in any way apprized of their liability to eternal judgment for their relation to Adam, or for the crimes of their immediate progenitors.

The descriptive epithets, “small and great,” applied to persons whom John saw arraigned in

* Gen. xviii. 23. Psalm xvi. 13. Eccl. xii. 14, and xi. 9. Rom. iii. 5, 6. Jude 14, 15. Acts xvii. 31. 2 Cor. v. 10, 11. Matt. xii. 36.

† Rom. ii. 3—5.

‡ Matt. xiii. 40—43.

§ John xii. 48. Matt. x. 14, 15, and Matt. xxv.

|| Luke ix. 25—29.

judgment, are with good reason interpreted, not of corporal stature, but of rank and order in social life. And even were the literal import of the terms to be considered preferable, no condemnatory sentence on those who are personally innocent can be implied; for it is explicitly stated, that the persons arraigned, “were judged from the things written in the books, according to their works*.” Far, therefore, from there appearing in the Holy Scriptures any traces of a design to condemn infants, there have not been discovered any reference to them in all the varied announcements of the great day; and further still, the mode of proceeding in judgment, is altogether inapplicable to the condition of those who, while in the present world, remain incapable of moral agency.

But while scriptural accounts of the future judgment thus warrant a conclusion, that infants will be exempted from condemnation, we are not left to suppose, that for the same reasons they will be excluded from salvation. Though condemnation will be according to personal merits, acquittal will not. Even in the proceedings of that great day, there will be an illustrious display of sovereign benevolence. Such as possess the eternal inheritance will receive it not as a remuneration for their deserts, but as their birthright, and in virtue of their relation to Jesus Christ†.

* Rev. xx. 12.

† 1 Pet. i. 2, 3.

Now, it is almost too obvious to need remark, infants are suitable objects of sovereign benevolence,—may receive the gifts of divine liberality,—may be born to the heavenly inheritance as well as to an earthly patrimony,—and may be indebted to Jesus Christ for a salvation which is wholly of grace. Deceased infants, in short, appear as much capable of receiving and enjoying the fulness of eternal life, as they appear incapable of suffering from an accusing conscience, the bitterness of everlasting death.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

General conclusion.—Application of the subject—to pious parents;—to irreligious parents;—to theological systems;—to the extent of redemption.

THUS, in whatever direction the discoveries of revelation are contemplated, we are led to the same conclusion. Such concurrent tendency in the leading doctrines of the Scriptures, and in important facts considered in their insulated form, adds considerable weight to the reasoning from any one of them separately taken. The aggregate forms a mass of evidence, sufficient to render highly probable, even if it be still thought too much to say morally certain, the opinion announced in the Introduction, that all children dying in infancy are “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

Pious friends, bereft of their beloved little ones, may therefore console themselves with the hope which David indulged, “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*”

That penitent servant of Jehovah, possessing far less advantages than Christians for discovering the glorious extent of divine mercy through the

* 1 Sam. xii, 15—23.

Redeemer, and under circumstances which, if any thing could, might dissipate his hopes for the happiness of his departed child, caught such a glance into the everlasting state, as proved a sovereign balm to his deeply wounded heart. That child was the fruit of most fearful and aggravated crimes, —of crimes which extorted indications of Jehovah's displeasure against not only himself but his family. It had been removed by death, expressly as a token of that displeasure, and before it could receive the sign of God's covenant regard for the offspring of his chosen people. Yet does David declare his full conviction, which has been promulgated through all succeeding generations by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that he should hereafter meet his lamented child in peace.

On occasion of its death, no agonies wrung his bosom, such as he afterwards felt when Absalom was cut off in his own iniquities; no burst of paternal anguish issued from his lips, "O my son, my son, would God I had died for thee;" but on the contrary, he threw off his mourning attire, he went into the house of God, and worshipped. His affections lingered not about the sepulchre where his infant's remains were entombed; for that could yield but a poor and very inadequate consolation. He did not merely anticipate his own departure to the world of spirits; for there a great gulf is fixed, as certainly prohibitive of intercourse

between the saved and the lost, as that which lies between the living and the dead. But on the wings of faith, that evidence of things unseen, he ascended to the world of glory, contemplating there re-union with his departed child, amidst the splendours in which his greater Son and Lord “shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever.”

Such an example ought christian parents to emulate; and it perhaps is not presumptuous to hope, that the preceding discussion will animate their heart, and invigorate their upward flight. Let them with David cherish the expectation of a triumphant meeting with the dear lamented objects of their affection, in regions of unmingled and uninterrupted joy.

Far, very far, from such persons, be the petulant and most indecorous complaint, “why have we brought forth for the tomb? why was not that sweet pledge of connubial love rather withheld than thus prematurely removed?” Let them rather bow in meek submission, listening to their heavenly Father’s voice, “Be still, and know that I am God.—May I not do what I will with mine own? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Or if so querulous and unworthy an enquiry must be answered, let them consider, that however short the stay their infants in this portal of existence, entrance here was necessary that they might proceed into the august interior of the temple. They have

not brought forth a mere prey for the tomb, but “a seed which is counted to the Lord, for a generation.” Over the dust of their departed infants, as over the precious purchase of his sufferings, the great Redeemer watches till he shall have fashioned it “like unto his glorious body;” and meanwhile, their happy spirits find with him sweeter repose, than was ever enjoyed within a father’s embrace, or even on a mother’s genial bosom.

He who wept at the grave of Lazarus, will graciously allow for the infirmities of our nature; “for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.” And he has himself set us an example of indulging the amiable sympathies of humanity. But let us not, under providential bereavements, cherish a morbid sensibility, which precludes consolation, even when it might proceed from a conviction that our lamented babes are happy. This conviction would tranquillize our hearts, were they as disinterested as they profess to be, and as really influenced by affection to our departed children, as we endeavour to persuade ourselves they are.

Happy voyagers who so soon have reached the haven! Happy indeed are they, to have escaped so easily the rocks, and quicksands, and storms of life; and with so rapid a course, to have reached the shores of undisturbed repose, and “peace that passeth all understanding.” Shall Rachel, then, continue to “weep for her children, and refuse to

be comforted, because they are not?" O, let her raise her downcast eyes to those beams from the excellent glory which would kindle in her chilled heart a salutary glow; let her listen to that cheering voice which assures her that "there is hope in their end;" let her rise and seek her little ones in the bosom of Him who pronounced, "of such is the kingdom of heaven;" let her anticipate the happy, happy hour, when, bursting through the vail of mortality into his immediate presence, she shall find them there.

With such hopes pious persons may, and only pious persons can, with any substantial reason, console themselves. For the opinion advocated in the preceding discussions, pronounces a sentence of final separation between departed infants and their irreligious parents. Strangers to other evangelical sources of consolation, under their painful bereavements, these unhappy persons, by neglecting religion, equally deprive themselves of this cheering anticipation, that their lamented child is not separated from them for ever; that when a few more years have rolled their rounds, or even a few more suns have risen and set, they shall again receive it, mature in wisdom, holiness, and bliss, and fold it in an everlasting embrace.

The fearful agonies which irreligious descendants of holy persons must hereafter endure, are forcibly

suggested by our Lord. “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*”

But yet more acute and distracting must be the agonies of irreligious parents who, unadmonished even by the death of their children to “seek for glory, honour, and immortality,” behold at length the issue of their fatal neglect,—their long-lamented little ones in the kingdom of God, trophies of the grace which they themselves despised, and are therefore thrust out. Salutory will be those pangs of parental grief, which are rendered the means of inducing survivors to seek for themselves a participation of spiritual blessings; for in these alone can be found an adequate resource under the calamities of life, and an abundant compensation for them in the everlasting state. Yet however such a consummation were devoutly to be wished, if encouraging facts had not shewn that these dispensations are among the means of accomplishing the purposes of heavenly grace, it could scarcely be expected, that any would be prevailed upon to seek the kingdom of God, because their departed infants are there, whose thoughts are not attracted, and whose hearts are not allured thitherward, by grateful love to Him who, because the children were partakers of

* Luke xiii. 28.

flesh and blood, himself likewise took part of the same, that, through his own death, he might destroy him that had the power of death*, and through his own triumphs over the enemies of degraded man, might prepare in our Father's house mansions for us, that where he is we might abide for ever, participants of his own immortal felicity.†

It is a deeply penetrating consideration, that even mercy may require the infliction of a stroke so severe as the death of beloved infants. "Write this man childless," were, in cases it is to be feared awfully numerous, a decision greatly in favour both of parents and children. To the wicked parent himself it is a merciful dispensation, that God permits him not to aggravate his dreadful responsibility, by training up his child for perdition; and to the child it is distinguished mercy, that God no longer intrusts him with a parent who, it may be inconsiderately but not the less certainly, is prepared to devote him to the Moloch of worldly fascinations and sinful propensities. Yet hard indeed must be that parent's heart, who can take comfort in such a dispensation; and awfully inveterate his devotion to sin, who can reflect with composure that his lovely, smiling infants were crushed in his presence, by the iron hand of death, lest he should occasion their everlasting ruin, and augment his

* Heb. ii. 14.

† John xiv. 2, 3, and xvii. 24.

own final condemnation. May such reflections excite earnest and permanent desires for the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, with believing application to Jesus Christ for pardon and grace; so that henceforth, similar administrations of mercy may not, on these accounts, be desirable for either parents or children.

Though the vindication, or even the illustration, of evangelical doctrines, has not been professedly attempted in the preceding discussions; yet a hope is entertained, that to some amiable and candid minds who have been misled into prejudices against the theological system generally denominated Calvinism, those doctrines may appear in a form, somewhat more becoming their native beauty and benignity. On the principles of that system, under the modifications which now commonly obtain among its enlightened advocates, are the reasonings of the preceding pages conducted; and it is left to the reflections and investigations of every intelligent reader, to determine, whether any exposition of scriptural truth presents a more harmonious and becoming view of the divine character and government, or a more favourable aspect on the interests of human holiness and happiness. It will not, perhaps, be deemed presumptuous to record an honest conviction, that this system breathes the very spirit of angelic harmony, as it was borne through the expanse of heaven, when He who is its centre and

its soul appeared among men, to achieve the God-like work of human redemption, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace; good will towards men."

Notwithstanding all that has been written on the subject, it has, however, been the fate of this theological system to be misunderstood and misrepresented. Without pretending to exculpate some from this charge, who have appeared as its professed advocates, or to impeach the integrity of those who have enlisted themselves among its opponents, a wish may be expressed, that the latter, especially, would ever keep in view the admonition of a distinguished prelate.* "At least, take especial care, before you aim your shafts at Calvinism, that you know what is Calvinism. I must say, I have found great want of this discrimination in some late controversial writings on the side of the church, as they were meant to be. Better it were for the church, if such apologists would withhold their services."

From this want of discrimination, as it is charitably hoped, there has often been advanced a charge, that Calvinism dooms myriads of unsinching infants to everlasting perdition. No system is fairly chargeable with all the consequences which an ingenious opponent is able to extort from its avowed princi-

* The late learned and eloquent Bishop Horsley.

ples; much less therefore, ought unallowed deductions to be assumed as presumptive against its truth. In perfect consistency with their theological creed, have many Calvinists entertained the opinion advocated in the preceding pages; others, expressing a hope of its truth to the full extent, have discovered the wished-for evidence in favour of the children of pious persons only; but none of any consideration are known to have maintained, or even allowed, that the inference in question, is an evident and necessary deduction from Calvinistic doctrines. In direct opposition to what must, therefore, be considered an unfounded aspersion, it would require but little labour to prove, that the great peculiarities of this system, supply the most tenable and satisfactory grounds of hope for the salvation of all who depart this life antecedent to personal transgression.

Nor must these reflections close without suggesting, that this opinion presents a sublime and animating view of “the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” That we may ascertain the splendid results of the Mediator’s undertaking, the extent to which He who made his soul an offering for sin shall see his seed*, it does not direct us to explore, like the Cynic, the different denominations of professing Christians, for those

* Isa. liii.

who give practical and undoubted evidence of faith and holiness ; it does not impose on us the labour of tracing the progress of history, always imperfect and often partial, and of marking where, amidst regions of nearly universal darkness, the children of light appeared in scanty and sometimes undiscoverable succession ; but in one comprehensive view, it sets before us, perhaps the larger portion of Adam's fallen race, of every age, and every clime, and under every condition of moral disadvantage spreading its awful shades around,—as the purchase of his blood, the glorious recompense of his humiliation and suffering, the eternal trophies of his redeeming love, the stars which deck for ever his mediatorial crown. Not of scanty gleanings from remote corners of the field, will our Redeemer compose his final harvest ; for the commissioned angels will find his elect in the four quarters of the earth. The adorations of eternity will rise before his throne, from “a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,” “saying with a loud voice, worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”—“Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

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